

# COMOX VALLEY ECHO

## Students trained to perform CPR and operate defibrillator

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Over 500 students in the Comox Valley are receiving vital training that is geared towards helping save lives this year.

The Advanced Coronary Treatment Foundation and partners launched the ACT High School CPR and Defibrillator Training Program in three secondary schools of School District No. 71 – Highland, G.P. Vanier and Mark Isfeld.

This program has been established in close to 1,740 schools across Canada and over 3.6 million students have been empowered by their teachers with these essential lifesaving skills.



Comox Valley MLA Don McRae applies chest compression on a mannequin. / MICHAEL BRIONES / ECHO STAFF

This year is the first time it is being taught in the Comox Valley high schools. The program was officially launched on Monday at Highland Secondary.

Some students displayed the skills they learned, performing CPR as well as operating the defibrillator.

Highland students Georgia Veale and Hayley Rae expressed confidence that should a situation arise they can adeptly apply lifesaving procedures.

"This is very important because you'll never know when you may run into a situation that you need to handle, if you don't have help, you need to be able to do it yourself," said Rae.

With eight in 10 out-of-hospital cardiac arrests occurring at home or in public places, empowering youth with CPR training as part of their high school education will help increase citizen CPR response rates over the long term.

Veale encourages everyone to have this vital skills.

"If you didn't know how to do this and you come into this kind of situation, what would you do? Would you just call 911 and stand there? No, that would not be a very good idea. So you need to learn this. So you are prepared," said Veale.

To make this program possible here in the valley, funding and donations were sought to enable teachers to train their students. The school district now has 12 defibrillator mannequins and 12 defibrillator units.

Each year, over 500 students in the valley will be taught both CPR and how to use a defibrillator by their teachers, who also will receive the training.

"Every young student will graduate with the knowledge to save lives," said Sandra Clarke, executive director of the ACT Foundation, a national charitable organization that is establishing free CPR and defibrillator training programs in secondary schools throughout BC and across Canada.

Courtenay Fire Department's deputy fire chief Kurt MacDonald welcomed the program.

"It's a great program for anybody to take, both young and old," said MacDonald. "Statistics show the chances of survival diminish ten per cent for every minute CPR is not initiated. So having people in the area when an event happens, that have the training and knows what to do and how to respond is just a benefit to everyone."

Early CPR combined with early defibrillation can increase the chance of survival for cardiac arrest victims by up to 75% according to Heart and Stroke Foundation.

The Comox Fire Department has played a key role in placing automated external defibrillators in the different businesses, stores, public facilities and municipal buildings in the community in the last five years.

"The thing that we've been missing here is trained people," said Gord Schreiner, Comox Fire Chief. "So this is great to see people step up and start training students to do this because now we're going to have thousands of people trained to use these devices."

ACT is working in partnership with its provincial partner BC Emergency Health Services paramedics and staff, lead community partner, RBC, and health partners AstraZeneca Canada, Pfizer Canada, and Sanofi Canada to bring this program to the Comox and Courtenay secondary schools.

"With an AED there is better chance of saving the life of someone experiencing cardiac arrest. Training our young people to properly respond to these emergencies is a significant step in making our communities safer places, and I'm glad we are getting so many students to participate in this program," says Don McRae, MLA for Comox Valley.

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