

Defibrillators in Public Places – Briefing Note

A defibrillator is a machine designed to deliver an electric shock to a person whose heart has stopped. Termed a cardiac arrest, this is different from, but may be caused by, a heart attack, where blood flow to the heart is impaired.

An Automated External Defibrillator (AED) is designed to be used by a lay person. The UK's National Defibrillator Programme has placed AEDs in airports, railway stations, and venues where large groups of people gather. Their use relies on someone witnessing a person having a cardiac arrest and being prepared to use an AED.

Community public access defibrillators are AEDs owned and maintained by the community. They are designed to be used by anyone but training may be offered by the suppliers of the equipment. They are usually found on the outside of village halls or schools, and are usually in locked cabinets. Those in locked cabinets are accessed by a code which is held by the ambulance service. When a 999 call is made, the service will advise on the location of the AED and provide the code.

Another approach is to provide trained community responders with AEDs. Ambulance control centres dispatch these responders if they can reach patients in their local community more quickly than a normal ambulance.

Key factors associated with the successful use of an AED are:

- The need for someone to witness the cardiac arrest.
- For someone to deliver cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) quickly before arrival of the AED.

The table at the Appendix shows ambulance data for heart attack calls in Wiltshire by Community Area for 2008/09. Not all of these calls would require the use of a defibrillator.

Conclusions

AEDs are best suited to venues with large numbers of people, such as visitor venues like Stourhead, or possibly large village events.

Appendix

Wiltshire Heart Attacks

The table below shows ambulance data for heart attack calls in Wiltshire by Community Area for 2008/09. Not all of these calls would require the use of a defibrillator.

Community Area	Number of heart attack calls
AMESBURY	6
BRADFORD ON AVON	4
CALNE	7
CHIPPENHAM	12
CORSHAM	8
DEVIZES	10
MALMESBURY	7
MARLBOROUGH	11
MERE	0
MELKSHAM	15
PEWSEY	6
SALISBURY	15
SOUTHERN WILTSHIRE	4
TIDWORTH	4
TISBURY	2
TROWBRIDGE	16
WARMINSTER	7
WESTBURY	4
WILTON	5
WOOTTON BASSETT & CRICKLADE	15
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