

Portable defibrillators improve survival chances

A heart attack happens fast – and often.

The American Heart Association says sudden cardiac death from coronary disease occurs more than 900 times a day in the United States.

If it happens outside of a hospital, the survival rate is only about 5 percent, said Matt Goldstein, who holds a doctorate in health sciences and is director of the Good Health Center at Good Samaritan Hospital, Baltimore.

But using an automatic external defibrillator (AED), a computerized device weighing just 8 pounds, can boost the survival rate as high as 90 percent, if it's used to shock a patient within one minute of the heart attack.

"Every minute you delay shocking the patient, the survival rate drops 7 to 10 percent," Dr. Goldstein said.

That's why Good Samaritan is providing training for parishioners if a church buys an AED, which costs around \$1,500.

Father Henry Kunkel III, pastor of St. Mary, Pylesville, said his parish has an AED, which is kept next door to the church.

"So far we've been lucky; we haven't had to use it," he said. "We have it because we've had a couple of incidents where people have passed out in church or had heart attacks – luckily the ambulance got there quickly."

He credits parishioners who are paramedics for helping him get an AED and arrange for training. "We have a pretty active health care ministry, so we decided to do this," he said.

The computerized AED talks people through the steps of using it, with visual and verbal instruction on how to attach the leads. When the leads are placed on the victim, the AED analyzes their heart rhythm to determine if a defibrillation shock is

needed. If so, the device will say "Prepare to shock. Everyone stand clear. Do not touch the patient." Then the shock is administered.

"What's neat about it is they talk to you, they tell you everything you need to know," Dr. Goldstein said. "As long as you can put the pads on, push a shock button and stand clear you're good to go."

The training to provide CPR and use the AED takes about two hours.

Monsignor James O. McGovern, pastor of Church of the Resurrection, Ellicott City, says the parish has had one for five years and trains 20 people to use it each year.

"Ours is for both children and adults," he said, noting school staff is trained to use it, too.

Like all electronic devices that have become more portable and affordable, AEDs are becoming more common. The Archdiocese of Baltimore has one, as do several Catholic high schools and agencies such as Catholic Relief Services and Catholic Charities. About 12 parishes have the devices, too, although, representatives from Good Samaritan would like to see them in more churches.

"If you have a large amount of people who gather together, you have a higher incidence of sudden death, and you have other people around," Dr. Goldstein said, noting those people can be trained to use the AED.