
[HoustonChronicle.com](http://www.HoustonChronicle.com) -- <http://www.HoustonChronicle.com> | [Section: Houston & Texas News](#)

Oct. 11, 2006, 12:36AM

Defibrillator nearby when student died

Because device was locked up, Katy ISD acts to improve access

By HELEN ERIKSEN and LEIGH HOPPER
Copyright 2006 Houston Chronicle

The Katy Independent School District is taking steps to make automated external defibrillators more accessible after a 16-year-old student collapsed and died with an unused device 25 feet away.

The district acknowledged Tuesday that the closest AED was locked up in a trainer's office in the field house next to the track.

Jhonathan Bruda, a member of the Taylor High School cross country team, died Friday morning after a light workout. Family members said the teen did not have health problems and passed an athletic physical.

It's not clear whether the device would have helped Bruda, but the school has three portable defibrillators on hand and none was used.

A second device is kept in the nurse's office at the front of the campus, and a third one is in a training room inside the school.

An official with the Harris County Medical Examiner's Office said the cause of death is pending. But the death, the fourth involving a student athlete during or just after drills in the past three weeks, has raised questions about response plans as well as storage and accessibility of the portable AEDs at the school.

Taylor parents contacted Tuesday night said the district needs to provide answers.

"There is a lot of talk around the area now, and there are so many different versions of the story," said one parent who requested anonymity for fear of reprisals against his children. "All we want, and we deserve it as parents, is to know what went wrong and what the athletic department is doing to fix it. The school owes us that explanation."

Katy ISD safety manager Robert Bookout said the district will buy wall-mounted cabinets that will be placed in hallways in the field offices and other locations at all district campuses to improve accessibility.

"The AEDs will go into positions in hallways instead of being inside an office," Bookout said.

Dr. Anne Dougherty, who specializes in heart arrhythmia at the University of Texas Health Science Center in Houston, said AEDs provide the definitive, life-saving treatment for someone in atrial fibrillation.

"With a full cardiac arrest, every minute is about a 10 percent reduction in survival. At 10 minutes, the likelihood of surviving is pretty close to zero," she said. "That's why the best thing you can do is run to get the defibrillator."

No official policy

Katy ISD spokesman Steve Stanford said the cabinets would be similar to the kind fire extinguishers are placed in.

"... The move to place the AEDs in wall-mounted cabinets is being done to further ensure that accessibility never becomes an issue in the future," Stanford said.

The district does not have an official policy regarding placement. But Stanford said guidelines state the devices will always be stored in a designated location in each school, where it can easily be seen and accessed.

Stanford said that Friday morning, both track coaches Ryan Ratcliff and Amy Pitzel had keys to the trainer's office, where the defibrillator was stored, but did not get it because instructions from the 911 operator were to continue chest compressions.

Stanford said the coaches, who were the only adults on the field, acted quickly and did the right thing when Bruda collapsed "to call 911, describe what was happening and follow instructions."

Followed 911 instructions

Pitzel immediately called 911 on her cell phone, he said, and Ratcliff started compressions at the operator's instruction while Pitzel stayed on the phone relaying instructions to Ratcliff.

"They were not instructed to hook up the defibrillator because the ambulance was already on the way," Bookout said.

West Harris County Emergency Medical Services arrived within three to four minutes of the 911 call and performed CPR on Bruda before taking him to Christus St. Catherine Hospital in Katy, where he was pronounced dead.

Stanford said the coaches could not hook up the defibrillator and perform CPR at the same time.

Dr. David Persse, medical director of the Houston Fire Department Emergency Medical Services, said 911 operators follow international guidelines to instruct callers how to perform CPR until an ambulance arrives. Operators don't ask whether an AED is on hand, he said, because not everyone knows what one is, and "we don't want to distract."

Taking them on the road

The La Porte school district has two defibrillators within the high school athletics department, said district spokeswoman Beth Rickert. One is assigned to the main trainer, the other to the assistant trainer, and they take the devices with them to any event they attend.

At the junior high level, there's a defibrillator that travels with coaches, and another stationed at the nurses' clinic. AEDs also are kept in unlocked cabinets in nurses' offices at La Porte elementary schools. Nurses and coaches are all trained in CPR and AED use, Rickert said.

Katy's Bookout said he met with the district's athletic director, Rusty Dowling, Tuesday morning and all of the school trainers to address the accessibility of defibrillators.

Chronicle reporter Jenny Dial contributed to this report.

helen.eriksen@chron.com leigh.hopper@chron.com

[HoustonChronicle.com](http://www.HoustonChronicle.com) -- <http://www.HoustonChronicle.com> | [Section: Houston & Texas News](#)
[This article is: http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/headline/metro/4250364.html](http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/headline/metro/4250364.html)