

Top 10 Things to Look for When Implementing an AED Program

Sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) is unpredictable. It can happen anywhere, at any time, to anyone. Quick response and early use of an automated external defibrillator (AED) can make the difference between life and death. Although not everyone can be saved from SCA, studies show that early defibrillation can dramatically improve survival rates. In fact, it's proven to be the only effective treatment for ventricular fibrillation (VF), a potentially fatal heart rhythm associated with sudden cardiac arrest. By implementing a comprehensive AED program, you'll be creating a safer environment for your employees, visitors and everyone in and around your facility.

1. Choose an AED that's easy to use.

The AED you select should be so simple and easy to use that anyone can deploy it without hesitation. Responders must be confident that they can use the device safely and immediately. If they are intimidated by complex operations or unclear instructions, it could cause delays in treatment. The AED should require no more than two simple steps: turning the device on and applying the electrode pads. Fully automatic AEDs have this two-step process and make it easy for the responder by automatically delivering a shock without having to push a button.

2. Work with your local EMS agency.

In a cardiac emergency, you call 911 to summon help from Emergency Medical Services (EMS). To support a smooth transition from your facility to the ambulance to the hospital, it is beneficial to align your AED program with your local EMS agency.

Hosting "lunch and learn" sessions with EMS teams can help you understand what features and capabilities they would recommend in an AED. For example, the ability to shock up to 360 Joules is important to EMS teams because it offers a better chance of reviving a difficult-to-defibrillate patient, and increases the chances for a successful outcome.

In addition, you may want to deploy the same brand of devices used by your EMS agency. This allows responders to simply unhook the electrode pads from your AED device and plug them into their monitor/defibrillator without missing a beat.

Finally, make sure you inquire about ambulance response times, work with your EMS agency to determine a good place for the ambulance to arrive, and provide maps and directions for getting around your campus. This type of preparation and coordination creates a partnership, which helps to promote safety in your facility and accelerate EMS response.

3. Consider the total cost of ownership.

When considering the cost of an AED program, take into account not only the up-front cost of the devices, but also the ongoing costs associated with maintaining them over time. To keep the total cost of ownership low and reduce maintenance hassles, choose a device with a synchronized replacement cycle for pads and batteries.

Also, you may be able to increase your buying power by implementing your AED program across multiple sites. This could include other buildings on your campus, other remote facilities within your own company or other companies in your business park.

4. What technical and customer support is available?

When your AED device requires support, make sure you are covered. Choose a device with an 8-year warranty, the longest currently available. Also, call the manufacturer's technical support lines and see what kind of response you get. Does your call go to voice mail or is a service representative available to help you right away?

Periodically, manufacturers release new AED software updates. Find out what technical or customer support is offered to help you manage these updates, or any other operational issues you may have.

Also with regard to customer support, research the business history of the manufacturer from which you are considering purchasing your AEDs. Do they have a long history in manufacturing defibrillation technology and is the company financially stable? There have been past incidences when AED companies have gone out of business and the purchasers were left with no viable product support.

5. What program support is available?

Some manufacturers provide help with AED program implementation and ongoing readiness support. They can assist with AED placement, medical authorization, state and location registration, training, device tracking and automatic replenishment of supplies. Following an event, they can support data download and clinical review, perform a check of the device and supplies, and offer post-event counseling services. These services are provided under the authority of a qualified medical director who provides initial medical authorization and ongoing program oversight.

Review your internal management capabilities, and determine if associated programs like these would be helpful in deploying your AED program.

6. Place your AEDs logically and visibly.

Like a fire extinguisher, your AED devices must be placed in visible, accessible locations so one can be reached quickly in an emergency. In developing your plan, review the floorplan of your facility and identify locations where people are most likely to be during the day or during each shift. For instance, if the business office is locked after 5:00 p.m., don't place an AED inside.

It is a good idea to get input from employees to understand where they would like to have an AED. These are the people most likely to use the device so it is helpful to get their input as to its location. Many organizations place them near an emergency exit, a first aid kit or a fire extinguisher. Additionally, take into consideration a person's typical behavior prior to experiencing cardiac arrest. Someone may feel ill and go to the restroom, so placement near that location makes sense. SCA also frequently strikes while someone is eating, so AEDs are often placed in the cafeteria.

Finally, if accessibility is a challenge – for instance in a “clean room” or other restricted area – you may want an AED inside within easy reach of those working there.

7. Develop a training plan.

While fully automatic AEDs are designed for use by anyone, AED users should be training in CPR and AED use. Training in the use of an AED can help raise the comfort and confidence level of potential responders. Some organizations have put a program in place to recruit and train employees as “emergency medical first responders.” These people are educated in CPR, first-aid and the use of an AED, and are situated across the facility in different areas, on different shifts, so someone is always available to help respond to an emergency.

Some AEDs are prescription devices, please consult your physician.

Emergency medical first responders receive formal training every year, and engage in exercises and drills every three months to keep their skills sharp. This preparation and training is invaluable in a real cardiac emergency when an AED is needed to save someone's life.

8. Create opportunities to raise awareness.

Your AED program is a sales campaign. By continually raising awareness of the program, you reinforce to employees and visitors that your organization is committed to their safety.

You may want to use posters, magnets, signage or other means to promote your AED program and identify where the devices are located. When you add a new AED, take the opportunity to give it a name, send an email highlighting its location, and invite people to check it out “on the way to the cafeteria,” for example. Other promotional ideas could include profiling your emergency medical first responders in an internal newsletter or offering general AED training to all employees at the company picnic. The key is to continue to promote your AED program and keep it top of mind across the organization.

9. Implement an ongoing maintenance routine.

Most new AED devices require little maintenance, and those with synchronized schedules for pads and battery replacement require even less. However, it is important to do a routine weekly or monthly visual inspection of the units to ensure they are in working order. Take the unit out, turn it on, check the battery light and ensure the pads are not passed their Use By date. Also, talk with your manufacturer regularly to get the latest information about upgrades or software updates.

10. Keep in touch with upgrade and trade-in offers.

If your unit is passed its warranty or beyond the manufacturer's recommended lifespan, or new technology has become available since your purchase, you may want to consider upgrading to a newer unit. Most manufacturers offer upgrade or trade-in offers to help you cost-effectively migrate to the newest technology.