Cardiac Arrest Deaths in College Athletes Decline, Still High for Black Athletes

Some experts attribute the decline to increased access to defibrillators in schools and CPR education.

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Deaths due to cardiac arrest among college athletes have steadily declined over the last two decades, yet Black athletes make up a significant portion of deaths compared with other racial groups, a recent analysis found, according to NBC News.

American Heart Association researchers analyzed data from more than 2 million NCAA athletes and found that 143 had died after a cardiac arrest following a game in their sport. What's more, the risk of death after cardiac arrest varied depending on the player's race, gender and sport.

Study coauthor Kimberly Harmon, MD, a professor at the University of Washington, said the study didn't determine why the rate of cardiac arrests has been decreasing but could be linked to better emergency action plans, more people knowing CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) or increased availability to defibrillators.

The decline might also be attributed in part to increased medical screenings among college athletes, including EKGs (electrocardiograms), which measure electrical activity in the heart and can identify dangerous heart rhythms. EKGs can help detect between two thirds and three fourths of athletes at risk, Harmon told NBC.

"The patterns on an EKG can also tell a lot about the shape and size of the heart," Harmon said. "In athletes, we are primarily looking for electrical or heart muscle disease."

When analyzing data by gender, race and sport, researchers found that basketball players had a higher risk of death from cardiac arrest: 1 in 8,188 in any given year.

"If you consider athletes who played four years, then it's 1 in a little over 2,000," Harmon said.

What's more, deaths among Black athletes were three times more common than those among white players: 1 in 27,217 and 1 in 74,581 in any given year, respectively. Some sports

cardiologists have attributed the higher risk of cardiac arrest in Black athletes partly to genetics, lifestyle and type of sport, according to NBC.

Researchers also found that men had a higher risk of death compared with women: 1 in 43,348 and 1 in 164,504, respectively.

The study underscores the importance of not only having an easily accessible defibrillator in schools but also ensuring that enough people know how to resuscitate someone experiencing a cardiac arrest.

To read more, click #Cardiac Arrest. There, you'll find headlines such as "Heart Disease in Black and Latina Women," "$1.2 Million Grants to Improve Heart Health in Black Communities" and "New Campaign Encourages African Americans and Latinos to Perform CPR."

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