

AED saved 14-year-old girl's life

Wayland girl suffered from abnormal heart rhythm

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By Anne Schieber

WAYLAND, Mich. (WOOD) - A 14-year-old Wayland girl is back home after she nearly died in the gym of her middle school.

An automatic external defibrillator -- or AED -- saved her life.

Samantha Lappin has no memory of what happened when she collapsed at the Wayland Union Middle School gym while playing tag.

School workers suspected a seizure. But instead, her heart had gone into an abnormal heart arrhythmia, which can be fatal.

To be safe, school personnel used the school's AED. The school district installed the portable devices last year and trained personnel this summer.

"I don't know the exact timing, but it seems to me they acted real fast. Everything was in motion quick and it was hooked up fast," said Jim Lappin, Samantha's father.

Once the electrodes were attached to her chest, the machine told the staff when to do CPR and when to stop so that the machine could shock her heart.

The machine kept her alive until paramedics arrived and rushed her to the hospital.

It took hours for Samantha's heartbeat to return to a normal. She was on life support and hospitalized for eight days.

Doctors diagnosed a rare heart abnormality known as CPVT (catecholaminergic polymorphic ventricular tachycardia), which is often inherited. The illness, a disorder of the heart's electrical beat, can manifest suddenly after exertion. Sometimes, the first symptom is sudden death.

In Samantha's case, her parents think there may have been a sign when she was 6 years old. She collapsed at an amusement park and was rushed to the hospital. But after extensive testing, doctors couldn't find anything wrong.

Her parents wonder if she has had brief arrhythmias before and whether they may have blocked oxygen to her brain and affected her cognitive development.

She now has an implanted pacemaker and takes medication to keep her heart stable.

Samantha will return to school on Wednesday.

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Wes Leonard Heart Team: An advocacy group that encourages adequate placement of AEDs in schools and other public facilities.

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