



## Emergency Life Support skills briefing British Heart Foundation (BHF) Cymru, April



### What is Emergency Life Support?

Emergency Life Support (ELS) is the key set of actions needed to keep someone alive until professional help arrives. It includes performing cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), dealing with choking, serious bleeding, how to put someone in the recovery position and helping someone who may be having a heart attack.



### What needs to happen?

**We are calling for ELS, including vital CPR, to be a mandatory part of secondary education in Wales.** Secondary school students should be taught it from year 7, and their skills should be refreshed every year until they leave school.



**ELS is simple, and easy to teach and learn.** It can be performed without any special medical knowledge. **It takes as little as two hours to teach, just 0.2% of a school year.** In just two hours of their school life, children can learn the skills to save a life. Teachers can include ELS in a range of different subjects including Personal and Social Education (PSE), Physical Education and Science.



Children of 10 years and above can learn the full range of ELS including vital CPR, and younger children are also able to learn many of the skills. Primary schools should be encouraged to teach their children many of the skills including dialling 999, calling for help and checking for danger.



**Leaving decisions on ELS to individual schools has meant that too few children are trained in these crucial skills.** This requires the Welsh Government to act now to drastically increase the numbers trained in ELS.



### Why is ELS so essential?

Due to a lack of data collection, out-of-hospital cardiac arrest statistics are not available for Wales, however, it is estimated that there are around 60,000 out-of-hospital cardiac arrests in the UK each year. Survival across the UK is variable, with between 2-12 per cent of these people surviving to be discharged from hospital depending on where the arrest takes place.



It is estimated that around two-thirds of cardiac arrests that occur outside of hospital occur in the home, and nearly half that occur in public are witnessed by bystanders. With each minute that passes in cardiac arrest before defibrillation, chances of survival are reduced by about 10 per cent. Immediate CPR in a shockable out-of-hospital cardiac arrest can improve the chances of survival by up to a factor of three.



Evidence from the US shows that if an emergency ambulance is called and immediate bystander CPR is used, followed by early defibrillation and effective post-resuscitation care, **survival rates following cardiac arrest can exceed 50 percent.**





**ELS isn't just about stats and numbers. It makes a huge difference to people's lives.**

Tabatha McElligott was just 17 years old when she collapsed at school. While studying for her A-levels, she had suffered a cardiac arrest.

Luckily, the school receptionist was trained in CPR – this bought Tabatha a few crucial minutes before a community responder arrived with a defibrillator.

Tabatha said: "If I had been at home with friends when it happened, there is very little chance I would still be here today. There are others who are not so lucky.

"If everyone had the simple knowledge of ELS skills at a young age through their schooling it may not seem so daunting if they are ever caught in an emergency situation."



**How could this work in practice?**

Organisations including **BHF Cymru**, **St John Ambulance** and **British Red Cross** already successfully provide training and support for teachers so they can deliver ELS. Community Resuscitation Development Officers (CRDOs), established by the BHF, develop community resuscitation programmes across their regions within Ambulance Trusts, and **deliver ELS training and support to teachers** as part of the wider ambulance service response.

With additional resources, these models could be successfully applied across all schools in Wales. There are over 200 local authority maintained secondary schools teaching over 200,000 pupils. Wales is now the only devolved country in the UK that does not have some form of community resuscitation network. Greater investment is therefore needed, with a minimum of **five** CRDO posts created.



**Do teachers support this idea?**

We commissioned research in February 2011 to find out the views of teachers across the UK on the idea of schools being mandated to train pupils in ELS. There was particularly high support among teachers with **86 per cent** of the 500 surveyed said they were in favour of this move.

This support is also replicated among parents and children across the UK. **70 per cent** of 2,072 parents surveyed wanted to see their children trained in ELS. **78 per cent** of 1,000 children surveyed aged 11 to 15 years wanted to learn these key skills, with a large proportion unsure of what they would do in an emergency.



**Our vision is for every child to leave school knowing how to save a life**

We are already behind many of our European neighbours – France, Denmark and Norway all have life-saving skills such as CPR as a

P-04-396 Emergency Life Support Skills (ELS) for Wales Schoolchildren -  
Correspondence from the petitioner to the Chair, 12.04.13  
mandatory part of their school curricula. They have been using strategies ranging from self-learning with  
DVDs and manikins to structured teaching – **all as part of the curriculum.**

Further afield, in Seattle CPR has been taught for over thirty years within PE lessons at all schools funded by  
the city government. Over half of the population of Seattle and surrounding King County are now trained in  
CPR, and survival rates for witnessed cardiac arrests were very high at **49 per cent** in 2010.

By teaching children ELS at school, we can create **a new generation of lifesavers**. Children can learn and  
retain new skills more easily than adults and are also often present at emergencies.

**We all learnt skills as children – how to ride a bike, play a musical instrument, or speak a foreign  
language. Why not add 'How to save a life' to that set of skills?**

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#### **About BHF Cymru and Resuscitation Council (UK)**

BHF Cymru operates a successful Heartstart Schools Programme, teaching children ELS. Currently, around  
200 schools in Wales are teaching ELS through Heartstart – around a quarter of these are secondary schools.  
The Resuscitation Council (UK) is principally involved in producing and disseminating national guidelines in  
cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

**If you believe every child in Wales should leave school knowing how to save a life please contact  
Delyth Lloyd, BHF Cymru's Public Affairs Manager on 02920 382406 or email [lloyd@bhf.org.uk](mailto:lloyd@bhf.org.uk)**