

Minutes Matter: Don't Put Your Heart Health On Hold During COVID-19 **By Michael Rosen, Chief Medical Officer Havasu Regional Medical Center**

When a heart attack strikes, every minute matters. In fact, the first few minutes are critical in determining the short-term and long-term outcome for the patient. While the world continues to focus on the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, cardiovascular disease, or heart disease, is still the leading cause of death in the United States – and as such – it's important to seek care in an emergency.

At Havasu Regional Medical Center, we want to stress the importance of recognizing the signs and symptoms of a heart-related emergency and that our hospital is still a safe place to come should you or your loved ones need care. Not only do we have safety measures in place to protect our patients from infection, but quickly taking action in an emergency will help ensure that the victim gets proper medical treatment before it's too late.

Heart disease refers to problems inhibiting the heart's ability to properly function and circulate blood through the body. Many of these problems are related to atherosclerosis – the process of a substance called plaque building up in the walls of the arteries. Plaque buildup narrows the arteries, making it harder for blood to flow through. This increases the risk of a blood clot forming, which can stop blood flow and potentially cause a heart attack, stroke or even cardiac arrest.

Heart attacks, stroke and cardiac arrest are all life-threatening, and every second is critical in regard to response time and treatment. If you or someone around you is experiencing any of the following symptoms identified by the American Heart Association, call 9-1-1 immediately to receive help and treatment as quickly as possible.

Symptoms of a heart attack:

- **Chest discomfort.** Most heart attacks involve discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes, or that goes away and comes back. It can feel like uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain.
- **Discomfort in other areas of the upper body.** Symptoms can include pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach.
- **Shortness of breath** with or without chest discomfort.
- **Other signs** may include breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness.

Symptoms of a stroke:

- **Face drooping.** If you notice one side of your or someone else's face drooping, or if it is numb, this is a telltale sign of a stroke. If you are uncertain, ask the person to smile. If their smile droops on one side, they are likely having a stroke and it's time to call 9-1-1.
- **Arm weakness.** Many stroke victims experience weakness or numbness in one arm.
- **Speech difficulty.** Speech may be slurred, prohibited or difficult to understand. If someone you are with is experiencing this, ask him or her to repeat a simple sentence, like "the sky is blue." If he or she cannot, call 9-1-1 immediately.

Symptoms of cardiac arrest:

- **Sudden loss of responsiveness.** If the person does not respond when tapped on the shoulder, they are likely experiencing cardiac arrest.
- **No normal breathing.** The victim does not take a normal breath when you tilt the head up and check for at least five seconds.

If you have heart disease or condition or have survived a stroke, you may be considered higher risk for COVID-19 complications, but don't delay routine care. Call your doctor as you may be able to get advice over the phone or use telehealth for a virtual visit.

HRMC is proud to be an Accredited Chest Pain Center and Arizona's first accredited Cath Lab demonstrating our ongoing commitment to our community's heart health. HRMC is also a designated cardiac receiving Center by the Arizona department of Health Services.

In the event of a heart-related emergency, know the signs and symptoms and call 9-1-1. Acting quickly may save a life, including your own. To learn more, visit heart.org or our website www.havasuregional.com.