

Safety Tip of the Month – January 2008
VSI Safety Committee

“Know your Heart Attack, Stroke or Cardiac Arrest Symptoms and Warning Signs”

Heart Attack Symptoms and Warning Signs

If you think you're having a heart attack, call 9-1-1 or your emergency medical system immediately.

Some heart attacks are sudden and intense — the "movie heart attack," where no one doubts what's happening. But most heart attacks start slowly, with mild pain or discomfort. Often people affected aren't sure what's wrong and wait too long before getting help. Here are signs that can mean a heart attack is happening:

- **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.** May occur with or without chest discomfort.
- **Other signs.** These may include breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness.

As with men, women's most common heart attack symptom is chest pain or discomfort. But women are somewhat more likely than men to experience some of the other common symptoms, particularly shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting, and back or jaw pain.

If you or someone you're with has chest discomfort, especially with one or more of the other signs, don't wait longer than a few minutes (no more than 5) before calling for help. Call 9-1-1... Get to a hospital right away.

Calling 9-1-1 is almost always the fastest way to get lifesaving treatment. Emergency medical services staff can begin treatment when they arrive — up to an hour sooner than if someone gets to the hospital by car. The staff is also trained to revive someone whose heart has stopped. You'll also get treated faster in the hospital if you come by ambulance.

If you can't access the emergency medical services (EMS), have someone drive you to the hospital right away. If you're the one having symptoms, don't drive yourself, unless you have absolutely no other option.

Stroke Warning Signs and Symptoms

If you notice one or more of these signs, don't wait. Stroke is a medical emergency. Call 9-1-1 or your emergency medical services. Get to a hospital right away!

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body
- Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden, severe headache with no known cause

If you or someone with you has one or more of these signs, don't delay! Immediately call 9-1-1 or the emergency medical services (EMS) number so an ambulance (ideally with advanced life support) can be sent for you. Also, check the time so you'll know when the first symptoms appeared. It's very important

to take immediate action. If given within three hours of the start of symptoms, a clot-busting drug can reduce long-term disability for the most common type of stroke.

Call 9-1-1 immediately if you experience symptoms! Time lost is brain lost!

Take action in an emergency.

- Not all the warning signs occur in every stroke. Don't ignore signs of stroke, even if they go away!
- Check the time. When did the first warning sign or symptom start? You'll be asked this important question later.
- If you have one or more stroke symptoms that last more than a few minutes, don't delay! Immediately call 9-1-1 or the emergency medical service (EMS) number so an ambulance (ideally with advanced life support) can quickly be sent for you.
- If you're with someone who may be having stroke symptoms, immediately call 9-1-1 or the EMS. Expect the person to protest — denial is common. **Don't take "no" for an answer.** Insist on taking prompt action.

Be prepared for an emergency..

- Keep a list of emergency rescue service numbers next to the telephone and in your pocket, wallet or purse.
- Find out which area hospitals are primary stroke centers that have 24-hour emergency stroke care.
- Know (in advance) which hospital or medical facility is nearest your home or office.

Cardiac Arrest Warning Signs and Symptoms

Cardiac arrest strikes immediately and without warning.

Here are the signs:

- Sudden loss of responsiveness (no response to vigorous stimuli) ... (e.g. brisk pinching of the shoulders).
- No breathing (the victim does not breath when you tilt the head up and check for at least ten seconds).
- The victim does not have a heartbeat. You are not able to feel a carotid pulse (main artery on each side of neck).

If these signs of cardiac arrest are present, tell someone to call 9-1-1 and get an AED (if one is available) and *you begin CPR immediately.*

If you are alone with an adult who has these signs of cardiac arrest, call 9-1-1 and get an AED (if one is available) before you begin CPR.

Use an AED as soon as it arrives.