Sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) is the leading killer of exercising student-athletes in the U.S., and studies show that student-athletes are at higher risk than other youth.

The ability of screening to identify at-risk student athletes varies widely. Pre-participation physical exams (PPE) or sports physicals alone are extremely poor at identifying cardiovascular conditions that could lead to sudden death. The addition of an electrocardiogram or other tests to the sports physical increases the ability to detect these conditions, but even these additional tests do not catch everyone. Raising awareness of SCA-related signs and symptoms and ensuring proper protocols are in place once a student-athlete displays those symptoms is the “universal precaution” that will protect the greatest number of students.

The AMSSM supports legislation that will provide real protection of student-athletes, raise awareness of SCA, and provide the tools and training to coaches and students to increase the chances of survival should a student develop SCA.

AMSSM supports:

- Legislation that raises awareness of SCA through mandatory education programs and materials for coaches, student-athletes and parents. Education is critical. Some students may display symptoms such as fainting prior to SCA that can be disregarded as non-life threatening. Awareness will decrease the chances of symptoms being ignored and increase the likelihood that other symptoms aren’t missed.

- Clinically-appropriate pre-participation screening, led and performed by physicians, as the best way to evaluate risks before student-athletes step onto the field. Screening decisions should not involve blanket mandates, should take into account the population being screened, and ultimately should be left to the discretion of the screening physician.

- Legislation that requires mandatory reporting of all sudden cardiac events in young people. Doing so will allow us to begin to develop a clearer picture of the relative causes of, and incidence of sudden cardiac arrest in the student population.

- Legislation promoting placement of automated external defibrillators and certified athletic trainers in schools, as well as support for CPR certification as a requirement for high school graduation. In cardiac arrest, minutes matter. Survival rates decrease about 10% per minute that electrical shock is delayed. It is vital for those affected by SCA to be in the presence of people who know the cardiac chain of survival and have access to the necessary equipment to save those lives.

- Legislation requiring that schools develop emergency action plans, as well as encouraging these institutions to include team physicians in the creation of those plans. When applicable, the team physician should be recognized as the lead medical professionals on-site.