

## Defib units coming to high schools

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All of Niagara's 30 high schools will be equipped with automated external defibrillators.

Provincial Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing Jim Bradley told staff and students at St. Francis high school in St. Catharines of the plan to have the devices available in all 30 of the region's high schools this year.

In addition, 5,700 Niagara students will receive training in the use of AEDs during a cardiac emergency. The devices can quickly deliver an electric shock to a heart that has stopped beating.

The initiative is the result of a public-private partnership between the Ontario government, the ACT Foundation and lead sponsor FirstOntario Credit Union. The bank will contribute funding for enough defibrillators for the 23 schools in the region that do not currently have the devices.

The plan comes at a time when the rate of heart disease among young people has skyrocketed. A recent report from the Heart and Stroke Foundation warned of an impending crisis for the health care system as young Canadians have higher cholesterol and blood pressure due to poor diets and lack of exercise, making them increasingly at-risk for heart disease at some point in their lives.

Emergency physician Doug Munkley said having AEDs in schools will save lives in addition to encouraging students to take better care of their personal health.

"Your choices will determine how your heart health will be," Munkley, the medical director for Heart Niagara, said.

"You can save someone else's life with this box that shocks and you can also save your own life by making healthy decisions."

Bradley, MPP for St. Catharines, said the plan will allow students to know how to save lives inside and outside the classroom, a change from the first-aid training for previous generations.

"Young people across our school system are going to be able to carry out activities that no one would have thought of 20 years ago," Bradley said.