

News story: Damian Hinds: Learning life-saving skills in school is crucial

The Education Secretary today underlined the importance of every child having the chance to learn life-saving skills such as CPR and how to get help in a medical emergency, under plans for health education to be taught in every school.

With emergency services reporting a spike in cardiac arrests during the winter months, and survival rates lower than usual – according to NHS England figures – Damian Hinds stressed the importance of the Government's plans for all children to be taught basic first aid in schools under proposals due to be rolled out from 2020.

The British Heart Foundation hailed the plans as a “decisive moment” in improving on the fact that fewer than one in ten people who have a cardiac arrest outside hospital in the UK survive. In countries that already teach CPR in schools, cardiac arrest survival rates are more than double those of the UK.

Education Secretary Damian Hinds said:

On arriving at university I was struck that the American students I met knew how to do CPR – and I didn't have a clue. As a father I want my children to have the knowledge and skills they need to keep themselves safe and help others, and as Education Secretary I want that for every child.

Learning the basic skills of first aid and techniques like CPR will give young people the confidence to know that they can step in to help someone else in need and in the most extreme cases – it could potentially save a life.

That's why we took the decision to include health education alongside relationship education for primary school children and relationship and sex education for secondary children. These subjects are a crucial part of our work to ensure children learn the wider skills they need to flourish in the modern world.

For every minute without life-saving treatment the chance of surviving a cardiac arrest drops by about 10% – meaning that the time before an ambulance arrives is crucial – but the British Red Cross has found that 95% of adults wouldn't be able, confident or willing to help in three examples of life-threatening first aid emergencies.

To ensure the next generation knows what to do in an emergency, the

Government is planning to make health education compulsory in all state-funded schools. Under the proposed new guidance, by the end of secondary school pupils will be taught how to administer CPR, the purpose of defibrillators, and basic treatments for common injuries.

The proposals are part of the Department for Education's plans to strengthen teaching of health, sex and relationships education – building on free resources already available for schools to teach first aid including those provided by the Every Child a Lifesaver Coalition, made up of the British Heart Foundation, St John Ambulance and the British Red Cross.

Simon Gillespie, Chief Executive of the British Heart Foundation, said:

The Department for Education's plans to introduce CPR on to the curriculum is a decisive moment in the battle to improve cardiac arrest survival rates, following years of campaigning by the BHF and others.

There are 30,000 out of hospital cardiac arrests every year, and each day people needlessly die because bystanders don't have the confidence or knowledge to perform CPR and defibrillation. This is why all schoolchildren should be given the opportunity to learn these skills.

Introducing CPR lessons into health education in all state-funded secondary schools is a significant step that promises to improve the odds of survival for countless people who have a cardiac arrest in the future.

Professor Huon Gray, National Clinical Director for Heart Disease at NHS England, said:

We are delighted that schoolchildren will have the opportunity of learning life-saving and first aid skills. Knowing how to react when someone suffers a cardiac arrest will truly save lives. Increasing the number of people trained in resuscitation complements the long-term plan for the NHS which will set out a strategy for the prevention and treatment of heart attack and stroke.

Schools will be encouraged and supported to teach high-quality relationships education, RSE and health education – tailored to meet their pupils' needs – from September 2019, ahead of it becoming compulsory in September 2020.