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## Public defibrillators double survival rates

Placing devices in malls, training people can save heart attack patients

By Daniel Q. Haney / *Associated Press*

**ORLANDO, Fla.** -- The first major test of public-access defibrillators found that placing the devices in office buildings and shopping malls and training ordinary people to use them can double the chances of surviving cardiac arrest.

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Defibrillators have already become standard equipment, like fire extinguishers, in many airports, convention centers and health clubs. And while earlier studies suggest they are safe, there has been no clear proof until now they actually increase survival.

Each year, about 250,000 Americans die from cardiac arrest, which can result from heart attacks, underlying heart disease or accidents, among other causes. While most such deaths happen in the home, roughly 20 percent occur in public places, and 95 percent of victims die even before reaching the hospital.

Paramedics can shock victims' hearts back to a normal beat with defibrillators, but they rarely arrive in time. In fact, every minute spent waiting for a paramedic lowers the chance of survival by 10 percent.

The latest study was intended to see if putting automated defibrillators about the size of laptop computers into the hands of ordinary volunteers increases the chances of saving these people while the ambulance is on the way.

About 1,500 defibrillators were distributed to 993 sports facilities, shopping centers, entertainment venues, community centers, office buildings, factories, apartment buildings, transit centers and schools in 24 cities. About 20,000 volunteers who worked there took part. Half were taught to do CPR only. The rest were also shown how to work defibrillators.

After almost two years, there were 292 attempted resuscitations and 44 survivors -- 29 among the volunteers with defibrillators, and 15 among those who did CPR alone.

Dr. Joseph Ornato of Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond presented the results Tuesday at a meeting of the American Heart Association in Orlando.

"The bottom line is we believe defibrillators in public facilities will double survival, if there are trained teams to use them," he said.