

Managing a defib: Mythbuster

Our guide explores common myths
and debunks them in plain English



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In 2025 Omaze raised funds for British Heart Foundation that will help to power The Circuit for two years.

There are many misconceptions about managing a defib and how it can help in an emergency



Registering your defib on The Circuit (The national defibrillator network) increases its chances of being used in an emergency.

However, the use of a defib doesn't guarantee survival. Other factors will also influence the chance of the person surviving including their age, their overall health and the cause of the cardiac arrest.

Our guide explores common myths and debunks them in plain English



Myth:

Looking after a defib is very time-consuming



#1

Fact:

Checking a defibrillator is quick and easy



It's a rewarding role and need not be time-consuming.
All you need to do is:

- Look at the defib regularly to make sure it's where it should be
- Check that the consumables items, such as the scissors, small towel and scissors are there and that the pads are in date
- Confirm that the self-check function indicates it is emergency ready

Registering a defib with The Circuit, the National Defibrillator Network, takes less than 15 minutes. It means it's easier for someone to find your defib in an emergency and will also help you manage your defib to ensure it's ready for an emergency. This will make the most of your time and give you peace of mind that your defib can help save a life.

The Circuit allows for Supporting Guardians to help so that you don't have to manage your defib alone, which takes the pressure off you when you are on holiday, ill or just busy.

Myth:
Looking after a
defibrillator is
complicated



#2

Fact:
Most defibs
carry out a daily
self-check



Most defibs carry out a daily self-check and will indicate a warning if there is an issue (check the manufacturer's leaflet for specific instructions). However, in most defib models, you just need to look for a green light or an OK or tick symbol on an LED screen indicating that the defib has completed the self-check and everything is in working order.

You will need to replace the pads when they expire as the adhesive gel dries out over time. They usually last 2 to 3 years, and the expiry date is printed either on a label or embossed into the seam on the foil packaging. If the pads have expired replace them as soon as you can. Leave your defib in place and don't change its record on The Circuit while you are waiting for new pads. All ambulance services agree that there is still a chance that the defib pads will work for a short period of time after the pads have expired.

The Circuit is here to support you by sending you reminders about the expiry dates of the pads and updating your record. If your defib has been used in an emergency, you will have to put it back in service. See our handy tips on how to do this
www.bhf.org.uk/circuitguide

Myth:

I will be held responsible if the defib was unavailable when it was needed



#3

Fact:

Neither the defib guardian, nor the person who uses the defib are legally responsible for responding to a cardiac arrest



Sometimes the defib is unavailable when needed, which is unfortunate, but it's not always avoidable.

The ambulance service may not have returned it after the last deployment, there may have been a problem with the supply of replacement pads, or the battery could have died between regular checks. If the defib you look after is not available for use when required and the person who had the cardiac arrest died, you are not responsible for their death.

A defib increases the chance of survival, but it does not guarantee it. If the defib was not available or not working, then there's nothing you could have done.

Myth:

Looking after a defib puts me at risk of being sued



#4

Fact:

There is no precedence for such a prosecution in the UK



Fear of being sued when looking after a defib is understandable but unnecessary. Given the current law in the UK, there is no basis on which a defib Guardian could be successfully sued. It is highly unlikely that the surviving family members of that person would therefore try. There isn't even any precedence for such a prosecution in the UK. However, we know that some people are worried about this, and it would be a shame for a community to be put off placing a defib because of this improbable fear.

Any help is better than none. A defib is a lifeline at the time of an emergency. Still, it is not guaranteed to be successful, and you should not feel responsible if someone dies following an unsuccessful attempt at resuscitation using a defib you look after.

CPR and defibrillation increase the chance of survival from a cardiac arrest, and so by providing the defib, you are already doing something great. But CPR and a defib do not guarantee survival following a cardiac arrest. Several other factors influence the chance of survival with a cardiac arrest, including age, overall health and the type of heart condition that caused the cardiac arrest.

Myth:

The local coroner will contact me if a person dies after the defib I look after was used



#5

Fact:

Coroners do not contact defibrillator Guardians as part of their investigation into a cardiac arrest



In that situation, it is typical for the coroner to contact the local ambulance service to ask for information about the resuscitation attempt. It would be highly unusual for the coroner to contact the defib Guardian, and currently, this does not happen. Even if a defib has been used in an unsuccessful resuscitation attempt, the duty of care remains with the ambulance service. You do not have to keep any specific records to provide information for a coroner's investigation or inquest.

The Circuit enables you to record all your checks and pad replacements which is helpful for the ambulance service. It helps them have greater confidence that the defib is being checked regularly and is more likely to be emergency ready when needed in a crisis.

Myth:

As a Guardian, I will need to comply with legislation for defibs



#6

Fact:

There is no statutory legislation that applies to a defib Guardian



There is no statutory legislation in any part of the UK that applies to a defib Guardian. However, as mentioned above, it is sensible and good practice to check it regularly as this will increase the chances of it being 'emergency ready' when needed.

The Circuit helps keep a record of checks, but this is about increasing confidence in the data and not about maintaining records to comply with legislation.

Myth:
Registering and
managing a defib
on The Circuit is
time-consuming



#7

Fact:
It takes between 5 to
15 minutes to register
a defib



Registering a defib with The Circuit (the national defibrillator network) is a relatively simple task. It takes between 5 to 15 minutes to register a defib, depending on how experienced you are with using a computer – and once you've registered, The Circuit makes managing your defib easier and your defibs data will be available to the UK's ambulance services 60 seconds after you register it.

It's a good idea to have the following information to hand before you register:

- The exact location of the defib, including its postcode and details such as 'on the third floor next to the lift' or the 'front external wall of the community centre'.
- Brand and model
- Expiry dates of the pads (including paediatric pads, if relevant)
- The access code if in a locked cabinet
- The availability times if not 24/7 (such as 9 to 5 Monday to Friday, 9 to 2 on Sat and not available on Sundays)
- The date the defib was last checked
- The email addresses of others who act as Supporting Guardians

Once registered, The Circuit can support you in your role as a Guardian. For example, it will remind you about pad expiry dates. You can also access The Circuit frequently asked questions and other defib guidance on the BHF website.

Myth:
I will need technical
skills to manage a
defib via The Circuit



#8

Fact:
You'll need basic
computing skills and
access to the internet



The Circuit is accessible via your web browser, such as Internet Explorer or Safari, so you'll need basic computing skills and access to the internet. You can use a smartphone, tablet, or desktop computer to register your defib and then carry out your routine Guardian tasks.

We've designed The Circuit to be as accessible as possible, and you'll find plenty of prompts and support within the user interface designed to help you.

However, if you get stuck, you can call The Circuit helpline team for support on **0300 330 5482** or email **NDNsupport@bhf.org.uk**

Myth:
Managing the
defib is solely my
responsibility



#9

Fact:
You can invite
others to become
Supporting Guardians



We need someone to act as the main contact (Primary Guardian). However, that doesn't mean you're on your own. Once registered with The Circuit, the Primary Guardian can invite others to become Supporting Guardians and help look after the defib.

You can simply invite others to join if you know their email addresses. For example, you may be asking someone who helped raise the money for the defib. Or, if you're not sure who can support you, use the map of your local area to see if anyone has volunteered help and use The Circuit to ask a volunteer.

The Circuit, the national defibrillator network was developed by British Heart Foundation (BHF) in partnership with Resuscitation Council UK, St John Ambulance, the Association of Ambulance Chief Executives, NHS England and Safe a life Cymru.

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