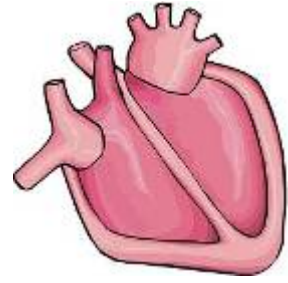


# Heart Attack Recognition



## *What is a heart attack?*

A heart attack occurs when the blood supply to part of the heart muscle is severely reduced or stopped. This is usually due to atherosclerosis—blockage caused by the buildup of plaque. Although not as common, coronary artery spasms can also cause a heart attack. If the blood supply is cut off for more than a few minutes, muscle cells suffer permanent injury and die. Depending on the extent of the damage to the heart muscle, this injury can disable or kill an individual. If the heart stops beating, then cardiac arrest has occurred.

## *What are the signs and symptoms of a heart attack?*

Some heart attacks are sudden and intense — the classic intense pain in the chest and right arm. But most heart attacks start slowly, with mild pain or discomfort. Often people affected aren't sure what's wrong and wait too long before getting help.

Typical heart attack symptoms:

- Chest discomfort. Most heart attacks involve discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes, or that goes away and comes back. It can feel like uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain.
- Discomfort in other areas of the upper body. Symptoms can include pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach.
- Shortness of breath. May occur with or without chest discomfort.

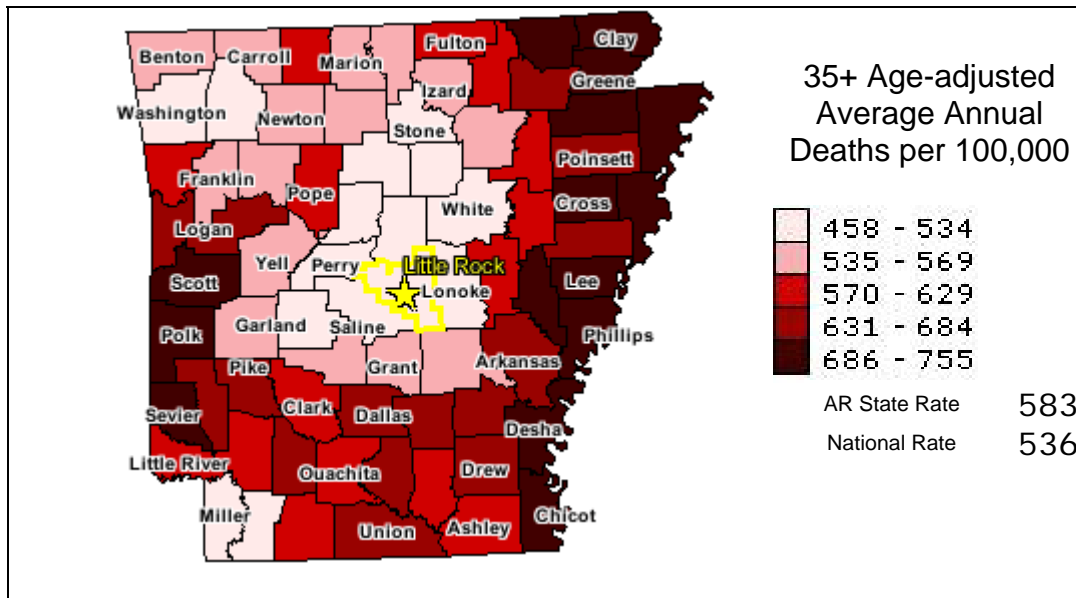
Other common symptoms:

- Breaking out in a cold sweat
- Nausea or vomiting
- Lightheadedness
- Back or jaw pain
- Feeling that something is just not right

## *Gender differences*

As with men, women's most common heart attack symptom is chest pain or discomfort. But women are somewhat more likely than men to experience some of the other common symptoms, particularly shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting, and back or jaw pain.

## Arkansas Heart Disease Death Rates by County, 1996-2000



### *What are the signs and symptoms of cardiac arrest?*

- Cardiac arrest strikes immediately and without warning.
- Sudden loss of responsiveness (no response to tapping on shoulders).
- No normal breathing (the individual does not take a normal breath when you tilt the head up and check for at least five seconds).

### *What to do if you or someone you know is having symptoms of heart attack or cardiac arrest?*

Don't try to wait out the symptoms of a heart attack for more than five minutes. Call 911 or other emergency medical services for help. If you don't have access to emergency medical services, have someone, such as a neighbor or friend, drive you to the nearest hospital. Drive yourself only as a last resort, if there are absolutely no other options. Driving yourself puts you and others at risk, if your condition suddenly worsens.

If someone exhibits the signs of cardiac arrest while you are present, tell someone to call 911, use an Automated External Defibrillator (AED) if one is available, and begin CPR immediately.

### *Reference*

American Heart Association [www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org)

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