# Experts warn of sudden arrhythmic death syndrome risk in young athletes



Experts have recently highlighted the potential dangers of a rare genetic heart condition, known as Sudden Arrhythmic Death Syndrome (SADS), which often presents with symptoms resembling common infections. According to research conducted in Sweden, individuals suffering from nausea, fever, muscle aches, and palpitations could be experiencing early signs of this serious health issue. Chest pains and shortness of breath are widely recognised symptoms of cardiac arrest, yet this study suggests broader indicators that may precede the onset of serious cardiac events.

SADS is characterised by sudden cardiac arrest without a discernible cause and reportedly affects around 500 individuals in the United Kingdom annually, as per the British Heart Foundation (BHF). This condition gained attention following several recent cases involving young, seemingly healthy individuals who collapsed during sports activities. Notably, Poppy Eagle, a 20-year-old fashion student from Washington, Tyne and Wear, passed away last August after her heart unexpectedly stopped, with SADS later determined to be the cause of her death. Similarly, 19-year-old Natalie Black, an athlete from Belhaven University, died in her sleep after setting a personal record in the triple jump, just hours before her death.

This new study tracked 903 cases of sudden cardiac deaths in Sweden from 2000 to 2010 among individuals aged between one and 36 years. The findings revealed that SADS accounted for 22% of all sudden cardiac fatalities during this period. Alarmingly, nearly two-thirds of those affected were male, with an average age of 23 at the time of death. Approximately 52% of the victims had experienced symptoms prior to their death, which typically included palpitations, fainting, and signs mimicking infections.

The results were presented at the European Society of Cardiology's annual Preventive Cardiology conference in Milan. Dr Matilda Frisk Torell, a cardiology expert from the University of Gothenburg and an author of the study, remarked, “SADS has not been well evaluated despite being one of the most common underlying causes of sudden cardiac death in young people, including young athletes.” Dr Torell stressed the importance of recognising the early signs and symptoms that may precede SADS, which could help identify individuals at greater risk during healthcare visits.

The growing concern around SADS aligns with recent incidents in professional sports, where a number of athletes have collapsed during matches. Uruguayan footballer Juan Izquierdo, who was just 27 years old, tragically passed away after collapsing in August last year. Likewise, Luton Town captain Tom Lockyer experienced a cardiac arrest during a Premier League match, with his heart stopping for two-and-a-half minutes.

Despite these alarming incidents, experts have stated that deaths related to sudden cardiac events in young athletes are not increasing, attributing the recent clusters of cases to coincidental timing rather than a rising trend. NHS data has indicated a notable rise in heart attack cases among younger adults over the past decade, particularly within the 25 to 29-year-old age range. A considerable increase in premature cardiovascular-related deaths has been observed, with public health concerns now pointing toward obesity rates and associated health complications as significant contributors.

With families of the bereaved pushing for a nationwide screening programme to identify those at risk of SADS, the UK Government has yet to announce any plans for implementation. As the research continues to highlight the critical need for better recognition of SADS symptoms and potential preventive measures, the ongoing discourse remains focused on improving health outcomes for young people potentially at risk of sudden cardiac events.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://sads.org/sads-conditions/> - This website provides information on SADS conditions, highlighting symptoms such as fainting or seizures during exercise and chest pain, which are crucial for early detection and treatment. It also notes the genetic nature of these conditions, with a 50% chance of inheritance from an affected parent.
* <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2025/04/250404124338.htm> - This article discusses a recent study in Sweden that identified signs preceding SADS, such as syncope and changes in electrocardiograms, emphasizing the importance of recognizing these symptoms to prevent deaths. The study was presented at the European Society of Cardiology's Preventive Cardiology conference.
* <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC1955549/> - This PMC article discusses Sudden Arrhythmic Death Syndrome, noting that while it often presents without warning, some individuals may experience non-sustained arrhythmias or symptoms like palpitations and syncope before sudden death. It highlights the need for better recognition and screening of potential genetic causes.
* <https://www.bhf.org.uk/> - While not directly referencing the specific article about SADS cases annually in the UK, the British Heart Foundation is a leading source on heart conditions and would be the authority on statistics related to cardiac issues in the UK.
* <https://www.escardio.org/Congresses-&-Events/Upcoming-Events/Preventive-Cardiology-2025> - This URL is related to the European Society of Cardiology's events, such as the Preventive Cardiology conference where Dr. Matilda Frisk Torell's study might have been presented. It provides context on the venue where such critical research findings are discussed.