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Stun Gun Sends Teen's Heart into Ventricular Fibrillation

NEWS BRIEF

**By Neil Osterweil, Senior Associate Editor, MedPage Today
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Also covered by: New York Times

CHICAGO, Sept. 2—A Chicago teenager's heart went into ventricular fibrillation after the youth was subdued by police with a Taser electric stun gun, reported physicians.

"An adolescent was subdued with a Taser stun gun and subsequently collapsed," wrote Paul J. Kim, M.D., and Wayne H. Franklin, M.D., of Children's Memorial Hospital here in a letter to the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

"Paramedics found the adolescent to be in ventricular fibrillation and began performing cardiopulmonary resuscitation within two minutes after the collapse," the physicians wrote. "After four shocks and the administration of epinephrine, atropine, and lidocaine, a perfusing rhythm was restored. The adolescent made a nearly complete recovery and was discharged from the hospital several days later."

The letter was accompanied by electrocardiogram tracings showing the boy's heart rhythm before and after defibrillation.

Tasers fire wired-barbs delivering an estimated 50,000 volts of pulsed electrical energy to the target.

At a meeting of the Academy of Forensic Sciences in February, electrical engineer James Ruggieri made a presentation in which he said that the electrical output of Taser's M26 model succeeds the fibrillation threshold for half the U.S. population.

In response, Taser International issued a press statement calling the report erroneous, asserting that the Taser's pulsed current is well below the safety guidelines published by the International Electrotechnical Commission.

In April, the human rights group Amnesty International USA reported that Tasers had caused more than 100 deaths in the United States and Canada.

The devices are designed to incapacitate subjects by causing rapid muscle contractions and intense but transient pain.

"TASER strongly supports independent review of its devices," says a statement on the company's web site. "A number of independent reviews have affirmed the life-saving value of TASER as a safer, effective non-lethal use of force."

In their letter to *NEJM*, Drs. Kim and Franklin suggest that in light of their findings, police who are equipped with stun guns should also be equipped with portable automated external defibrillators.

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