

When Polly Ward received an email from Minooka High School about a cardiac screening program offered through Morris Hospital, she didn't hesitate to sign up her two teenagers. Ward remembered hearing stories about seemingly healthy, active kids who died suddenly due to undiagnosed heart conditions.

Thanks to Morris' "Rhythm of Our Youth" screening program, the Wards learned that their son Mick has a condition that causes a disruption of the heart's normal rhythm.

Mick, along with over 4,500 students from seven high schools, have been screened since the program launched in 2016. On a pre-scheduled day, a specially trained volunteer crew from the hospital performs electrocardiogram (EKG) screenings on students who have parental permission. The test takes about three minutes, is painless and aims to catch the small percentage of students who are at risk for sudden cardiac death.

"I don't know when Mick would have ended up having an EKG," says his mother. "I feel so grateful that Morris Hospital would come into our high school and perform something that's a life changer."

Screenings are free and available to all students. The EKG machines and supplies needed for the screenings are funded through gifts from community members to the hospital's auxiliary and foundation. Results are sent home to the student's parents but are not shared with the school. Based on screening results, about 3 percent of students are referred to a physician for additional follow-up.

"Sudden cardiac death claims more than 2,000 lives of children and adolescents in the United States each year," notes Jori Christensen, Director of Cardiovascular Services at Morris Hospital. "Most victims of sudden cardiac death have had underlying heart conditions that could have been detected."

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