



Defibrillators and your workplace

Helping you understand
BS 8599-1
to keep your people safe

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➤ Current legislation – what's changing?

If you are responsible for a workplace with **five or more people present**, you need to be aware of a changing standard that will impact your business. This relates to updated guidance in BS8599-1-A1:2026.

For many years, automated external defibrillators (AEDs) have been available as a live-saving measure privately and to businesses. These are vital in responding to sudden cardiac arrests (SCAs). However, there has never been a legal requirement for UK workplaces to have an AED on site.

Although **the law itself is not changing**, an updated British Standard¹ will outline that an AED must be made available in workplaces where there are 5 or more people present. That figure will include staff, as well as visitors such as customers.

The evolving standard also makes it clear that an AED is no longer an optional extra. A device should be accessible to people within **two minutes** – one to collect the AED, and one minute to begin treating the affected person.

- Affects workplaces of 5+ people.
- AED should be reachable within 2 minutes from anywhere in the workplace.
- Not a legal change, but complies with HSE/BS law.



➤ What is a sudden cardiac arrest (SCA)?

SCAs are a leading cause of premature death, but with immediate treatment, **many lives can be saved** in the workplace. An SCA involves an abrupt loss of pulse and consciousness caused by an unexpected failure in the heart's ability to pump blood to the brain and around the body.

If an employee suffers from an SCA, the first step is to contact the emergency services as soon as possible. The second is to provide cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) to help maintain blood flow until defibrillation can be provided.

Defibrillation is a crucial stage in a sequence of events that need to occur for resuscitation of an SCA casualty. If performed within three to five minutes of collapse, survival rates can be **as high as 50-70%**.

➤ What is an AED?

In its simplest form, a defibrillator is a 'portable electronic machine (...) that can deliver a shock when needed to attempt to restore a person's heart rhythm'². Through its pads, an AED can 'monitor the heart's electrical rhythm and deliver a shock when it is needed'³.

AEDs are easy to use, compact and portable, and give voice instructions to the user. They are completely safe to employ and will not allow a shock to be given unless a person's heart rhythm requires it. These machines are also designed to be stored for long periods without use and require little routine maintenance beyond checking batteries, electrode pads, and expiry dates.

As the average response time for emergency medical services in a typical community is eight minutes, an AED on site could mean **the difference between life and death**.

For the best chance of survival, defibrillation should be delivered within the first four to six minutes. The likelihood of successful resuscitation decreases by around 7% to 10% with every minute that passes, and after ten minutes without defibrillation, few attempts of resuscitation are successful.

➤ What are the different types of AED?

The term 'AED' can sometimes be used generically, although there are actually two main types:

- Automatic defibrillators
- Semi-automatic defibrillators

While there are subtle differences, it's important to know that both types can be used by **non-medical experts** (that is, any member of the public).

However, one of the key differences is 'how much action is needed from the person using it'⁴. In practical terms, a semi-automatic AED asks the rescuer to press a button to deliver a shock, whereas an automatic AED will do that itself.

➤ What type of AED is right for your business?

When considering which AED is the best fit, remember it: 'isn't only about technical features, it's about who will be using it and how quickly they can respond in an emergency'⁵.

That means automatic AEDs are an ideal choice if your staff (or bystanders) have **zero medical training**. This is because the automatic AED knows itself when to administer a shock, at the right time, without human involvement.

Compare that to a semi-automatic AED, which involves slightly more user interaction. The device still analyses the heart rhythm and determines whether a shock is needed, but the rescuer must press a button when prompted to deliver the shock.

Some organisations prefer semi-automatic AED models where first aid training is already established. Bearing this in mind, sending employees on a reputable first aid at work course is also beneficial, as these can often include hands-on AED training.



➤ How can Arco support your business?

With over 140+ years' keeping UK businesses safe, Arco is the ideal partner if you need help selecting the right AED. Not only do we supply a wide range of automatic and semi-automatic AEDs, but our experts can help you develop a comprehensive first aid solution tailored to your workplace.

This involves working with you to identify the most suitable AED and first aid equipment for your environment, ensuring the overall solution supports your operational needs while helping you meet your health and safety responsibilities.

Rely on a true safety expert

Unlike products you might find in online marketplaces, Arco is a BSIF registered supplier. Being the UK's leading trade association for the safety industry, BSIF registration means that we only supply genuine, compliant, and fit-for-purpose safety equipment. This gives you complete peace of mind in an AED's provenance.

Arco also has a wealth of information designed to help you understand your first aid requirements, including your responsibilities as an employer, the latest statistics, and expert advice. So whatever your industry, we can ensure you have the right AED, training, and procedures in place to protect your employees.

➤ Summary

While the law around workplace AEDs may not be changing, the updated British Standard is clear: businesses should be ready to respond quickly when an SCA occurs. For workplaces with **five or more people present**, having an accessible AED can significantly improve a person's chance of survival.

Choosing the right device also helps ensure staff and visitors feel confident should an emergency situation arise. With expert guidance, compliant products, and trusted support, Arco can help businesses take practical steps to protect their people and create safer, better-prepared workplaces.

References

1. *BS 8599-1:2019+A1:2026*
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