

# 'Greater health risk' at Crop Over

**SUDDEN DEATHS can heighten the need for Barbadians to watch their health during Crop Over.**

So says chief executive officer of the Heart & Stroke Foundation, Gina Pitts, who has expressed concern over the health of the Barbadian population as the country continues to battle with non-communicable diseases.

At least eight sudden deaths were reported in June alone, all of which occurred in quick succession. Although the cause of deaths has not yet been revealed, the seemingly unusual phenomenon has garnered the attention of health officials.

Pitts said that based on statistics from the Barbados National Registry (BNR), events like **Crop Over**, Christmas and Valentine's were often linked to a hike in cardiovascular health problems.

"We are coming up to a very stressful period of time . . . . People drink more alcohol. There is lots more activity [whereas] people probably haven't been active for a long time and then suddenly

become active . . . .

"[So] you're putting more pressure on your heart. And if you have these kinds of issues, you're probably eating very badly," she said.

Pitts said as a result, systems should be set up to ensure greater chances of survival for event-goers during the festival. She questioned, for example, whether many events would be equipped with a defibrillator, which restarts the heart.

## **Get checked**

"An individual can survive sudden cardiac arrest if they have access to early CPR [cardio pulmonary resuscitation]. So somebody being able to do proper compressions . . . [and] access a defibrillator [would be beneficial].

"Barbadians need to get themselves checked, but also there needs to be systems in place. If you look at **Crop Over**, how many events would have a defibrillator available? If you go to any of the band launches, how many would have it available?"

She added that members of the public should also learn how to

perform CPR to help save people's lives before the ambulance arrives.

Based on a BNR report, in 2014 there were over 400 deaths caused by heart attacks (acute myocardial infarction). Pitt said the death rate for the year, if linked to heart conditions, could surpass that figure.

"I would say that it wouldn't be unrealistic to estimate that we would have similar numbers if not more. It just depends on the activities that people take part in, but definitely there was a trend for an increase leading up to and after a big event such as **Crop Over**," she explained.

Pitts said Barbadians needed to improve their diets and exercise. She noted that younger people would be expected to have cardio vascular disease outcomes, which were often sudden cardiac arrest, sudden cardiac death and strokes.

"We as a nation have to really recognise that we have a young population who are exhibiting cardio vascular disease early and the implications for that as we go on.



**GINA PITTS, CEO of the Heart and Stroke Foundation. (FP)**

"More preventative measures need to be put in place. There needs to be preventative screening for youngsters and better access to healthy foods in school. There needs to be tough guidelines on exercise in schools, for example, three times a week for at least three hours a week," she added. (LT)