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Safety takes top priority in coming triathlon and marathon

By Cubby Leong, TODAY | Posted: 28 August 2007 1002 hrs

SINGAPORE - The Aviva Ironman 70.3 Singapore Triathlon, to be held this Sunday at East Coast Park, has taken on greater prominence overnight.

Not only because it is the biggest Ironman event held outside of the United States — with prize money worth US\$38,000 (\$57,700) and 1,200 competitors from all over the world — but also due to safety concerns, following the death of Army Captain Ho Si Qiu, who collapsed after completing the 21-km Singapore Bay Run on Sunday.

It was the second race-related tragedy in three months, after 17-year-old Thaddeus Cheong also collapsed and died at a triathlon selection trial for this year's SEA Games.

For the inaugural Aviva Ironman event in Singapore, medical director, Dr Jason Chia, told Today that six doctors, six ambulances equipped with Automated External Defibrillators (AED), 15 paramedics on motorbikes and 10 medics will be on site.

Dr Chia, an associate sports consultant at Changi General Hospital, stressed the importance of athletes being medically fit to compete. "Race within your limits and adhere to safety guidelines. Don't race if you are unwell," he added.

"Education is key," agreed Alexandra Hospital's consultant cardiologist, Dr Ong Hean Yee. "People should know how hard they should push themselves."

Alexandra Hospital is the official medical partner of the Standard Chartered Singapore Marathon 2007.

This year's race is scheduled for Dec 2 and 31,000 have signed up. The closing date for entries is Oct 14 and the target is for 38,000 runners. On race day, the hospital will have around 20 doctors, 40 to 50 nurses, more than 100 first aid volunteers and 15 ambulances equipped with defibrillators on standby along the 42-km route.

The usual 6am flag-off time has been moved to 5.30am so as to lessen the impact of the morning heat and humidity on runners. The distance between water points has been shortened from 2km to 1.5km and drink points will be stationed every 3km, instead of 6km. But there is only so far endurance race organisers can go to ensure competitors' safety. If you want to take part, say medical experts, please — get medically screened.

Said Dr Chia: "Screening can help to pick up underlying conditions that can be aggravated by vigorous exercise. It is especially important if you have underlying diseases related to hypertension, diabetes or have symptoms such as dizziness or shortness of breath disproportionate to the level of physical activity."

But there is no need for paranoia. "These events are relatively rare," said Dr Chia. "A study has shown that for every 396,000 man-hours of jogging, there is one death. The health benefits of exercise for the general population outweigh the transient risk during vigorous exercise." - TODAY/fa



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Participants in an Ironman race

