

Snow-shoveling brings on heart attacks for 4 Ottawa men in 1 day

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Four Ottawa men had heart attacks while shovelling snow Thursday.

Ottawa paramedics said they were called Thursday to help a 61-year-old man and a 45-year-old man in Barrhaven, a 72-year-old man in Centretown and a 62-year-old man in the city's east end, all of whom experienced chest pains while shovelling snow. A storm had dropped about 15 centimetres of snow on the city the day before.

The 61-year-old, who collapsed in his laneway, and the 72-year-old were both found to be suffering from the most dangerous type of heart attack, known as an ST segment elevation for myocardial infarction (STEMI), said Ottawa Paramedic Service spokesman Jean-Paul Trottier.

"If left untreated, people die from that within about an hour to two hours."

The two were rushed to the University of Ottawa Heart Institute under a program that allows paramedics to bypass the emergency room if they diagnose this type of heart attack using an electrocardiogram.

The 45-year-old and 62-year-old men suffered less serious heart attacks.

'Tremendous burden' on heart

Trottier said it's not uncommon for paramedics to receive calls about people who experience chest pains while shovelling snow, as the strain of shovelling and the cold weather together cause a "tremendous burden" on the heart.

The first three calls came within 1½ hours Thursday morning.

Trottier advised people who have known heart problems or who are in poor physical shape to shovel slowly and take it easy while clearing snow.

However, he added that in general, shovelling snow isn't particularly dangerous.

"We don't want people to use that as an excuse tonight so they don't have to shovel their driveway."