

Quick Sickle Cell Facts

Sickle Cell is not restricted to one group.

- People in many ethnic groups can have sickle cell traits or disease. Although sickle cell trait and disease is most common among African Americans, people of Greek, Hispanic, Italian, Turkish, Asian and Mediterranean ancestry, Native Americans, and people in other groups may have it, too.

Sickle Cell disease is not contagious

- A person cannot catch sickle cell disease through the air, water, skin, sharing of person items, etc. The only way to get it is to have it passed on from your parents.

Sickle Cell trait cannot develop into sickle cell disease

- Sickle cell trait is not a disease. There is no chance that a person with sickle cell trait will get sickle cell disease.

Sickle Cell disease does not affect the mind.

- The disorder has nothing to do with intelligence. It only affects the body.

Sickle Cell disease is not a death sentence

- Many people with sickle cell disease lead long, productive lives.

How can I find out my Sickle Cell status?

A simple blood test called the hemoglobin electrophoresis can be done in your doctor's office or at your local sickle cell foundation. This test will tell if you are a carrier of the sickle cell trait or if you have sickle cell disease. It will also let you know if you have any of the other hemoglobin-producing genes that could lead to sickle cell disease. Everyone should have this test done once in their lifetime, but especially before getting pregnant.

Where can I find more information on Sickle Cell Disease?

What is Sickle Cell Disease?

Sickle cell disease refers to a group of similar hemoglobin disorders. The disease affects red blood cells and ultimately endangers the body's oxygen supply. Under normal conditions a substance in red blood cells, called hemoglobin, carry oxygen to all parts of the body. Because red blood cells are soft, smooth and round, they move easily through the body. In persons with sickle cell disease, the red

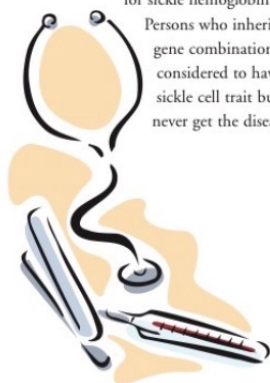
blood cells may become hard, sticky and banana-shaped (sickles). As a result the sickle shaped cells can clog blood vessels, causes excruciating pain and serious health problems.

All forms of sickle cells are disease are marked by anemia (a low red blood cell count) and by crescent-shaped red blood cells.

What causes Sickle Cell Disease?

Sickle cell disease is passed from mother and father to their children. If both parents have sickle disease, all their children will have sickle cell disease. However, people may inherit one gene for regular hemoglobin and one gene for sickle hemoglobin.

Persons who inherit this gene combination are considered to have sickle cell trait but will never get the disease.



Several possibilities exist for children whose parents or parents have sickle cell trait:

WHEN ONE PARENT HAS SICKLE CELL TRAIT and the other has regular hemoglobin, the chances for each pregnancy are:

- 1 in 2 (50%) that the baby will have regular hemoglobin.
- 1 in 2 (50%) that the baby will have sickle cell trait.

WHEN BOTH PARENTS HAVE SICKLE CELL TRAIT, the chances for each pregnancy are:

- 1 in 4 (25%) that the baby's hemoglobin will be regular.
- 2 in 4 (50%) that the baby will have sickle cell trait.
- 1 in 4 (25%) that the baby will have sickle cell disease.

WHEN ONE PARENT HAS SICKLE CELL DISEASE and the other parent has regular hemoglobin, all their children will have sickle cell trait.

WHEN ONE PARENT HAS SICKLE CELL TRAIT AND THE OTHER HAS SICKLE CELL DISEASE, the chances for each pregnancy are:

- 1 in 2 (50%) that the baby will have the trait.
- 1 in 2 (50%) that the baby will have the disease.

What health complications are associated with Sickle Cell Disease?

Sickle cell disease has been known to cause the following: severe headaches; episodes of pain (due to blocked blood flow to muscles and bone marrow); backaches; stomach cramps; liver damage; delayed growth and puberty; spleen damage; infection gall stones; jaundice; kidney failure; painful joints; strokes; eye damage (retinopathy); and for some, death in early childhood or adulthood. Comprehensive medical care, nutritional management and up-to-date information are the key weapons for fighting the devastating disease.