

Risk of infection in Sickle Cell Disease

Information and advice for patients

Sickle Cell & Thalassaemia

What is sickle cell disease?

Sickle cell disease is a genetic disorder where your red blood cells, which are normally round in shape, are mis-shaped like a sickle (crescent shape). This can lead to severely painful episodes, known as crises, and anaemia.

Why is there a risk of infection in sickle cell disease?

The spleen is a gland which forms part of the body's defence against some infections. It sits inside the left part of the abdomen (tummy) under the rib cage. It does not work effectively in patients with sickle cell disease.

If your spleen is not working fully, you will still be able to cope with most infections, but in some cases, serious infection may develop quickly. The risk of this happening is higher in children, but there is still a risk in adults.

What infections am I more likely to get?

The most common infections that you could have are viral infections such as coughs and colds. However, some infections can be more serious and can result in bloodstream infections, pneumonia or meningitis.

What can I do to minimise the risk of infections?

Antibiotics

To reduce the risk of infections you can take antibiotics. For some patients, regular low doses of antibiotics are given to help prevent the onset of infections. If your doctor has recommended antibiotics, these must be taken every day. The usual recommended antibiotics are either Penicillin V 250mg taken 2 times a day, or if you are penicillin-allergic, Erythromycin 250mg taken 2 times a day.

Vaccinations

Check with your GP that your vaccines are up-to-date.

The following vaccines are recommended:

- **Pneumococcal** (every 5 years)
- **Conjugated Meningococcal C Vaccine:** A single dose should be given if you were not already given this as part of your childhood immunisations
- **Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib):** A single dose should be given if you have not already received this as part of your childhood immunisations
- **Influenza (flu) jab:** This should be taken every year

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- Other vaccines may be needed if you are travelling to high-risk areas. Before travelling, you should check with your GP.
- If you are travelling to areas with malaria, then medicines to prevent malaria could be needed. Before travelling, you should check this with your GP.

What are the symptoms of infection?

- **Fever:** If you feel hot you should always check your temperature. If you have a temperature above 38°C you should go to the Emergency department (ED) immediately.
- **Low temperature:** If you are unwell and your temperature is lower than 37°C you should seek medical advice from your GP.
- **Rigors:** violent shivering that you cannot control.
- **Severely sore throat.**
- **Cough with discoloured phlegm.**
- **Pain or a burning feeling when passing urine.**
- **Sudden severe headache, neck stiffness or if your eyes hurt in or are sensitive to bright light.**

In the event you experience any of these symptoms or if you feel generally unwell, seek immediate medical attention or advice as soon as possible.

Early diagnosis and treatment are essential and could be life-saving.

Please contact your GP or the Sickle Cell and Thalassaemia Centre (SCaT) - in working hours, or visit the nearest ED out of normal working hours.

If there is anything you do not understand or you are not sure of, please contact us.

Contact details

Sickle Cell & Thalassaemia Centre
City Hospital
Dudley Road
Birmingham
B18 7QH
Tel: 0121 507 6040

The information in this leaflet is general and is intended to be a guide only. Please discuss the specific details of your treatment with your GP.

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Further information for patients

Sickle Cell Society, 54 Station Road, London NW10 4UA

Tel: 020 8961 7795 Fax: 020 8961 8346

Email: info@sicklecellsociety.org

Website: www.sicklecellsociety.org

Source used for the information in this leaflet

- Sickle Cell Society, 'Standards for the Clinical Care of Adults with Sickle Cell Disease in the UK', 2008.
- National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, 'Sickle cell disease', 2010.

For more information about our hospitals and services please see our websites www.swbh.nhs.uk and www.swbhengage.com, follow us on Twitter @SWBHnhs and like us on Facebook www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs.

If you would like to suggest any amendments or improvements to this leaflet please contact the communications department on 0121 507 5495 or email: swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net



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