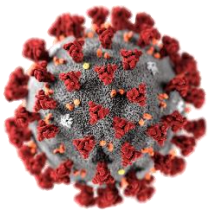
Sickle Cell Disease and COVID-19



What is Sickle Cell Disease (SCD)?

SCD is an inherited blood disorder that affects 100, 000 people living in the United States. Healthy red blood cells are round and carry oxygen to all parts of the body. SCD causes the normally round red blood cells to become C-shape, which is known as a sickle cell. Sickle cells have difficulty moving through blood vessels because of their shape. They can become stuck in blood vessels which causes pain, increase risk for stroke, and infection.

How is SCD inherited?

SCD is inherited from both parents.

What is Sickle Cell Trait (SCT)?

SCT occurs in individuals who have inherited one normal gene and one sickle cell gene.

How is SCD diagnosed?

SCD is diagnosed using a blood test. The blood test is usually done during the newborn screen.

What are complications of Sickle Cell Disease?

Complications of SCD include anemia, infection, Acute Chest Syndrome, vision loss, leg ulcers, stroke, and blood clots.

How is SCD treated?

The only cure for SCD is bone marrow or stem cell transplant. There is not a single best treatment for individuals with SCD. Treatment depends on the symptoms but can include over the counter pain medication, prescribed pain medications, and blood transfusions. Blood transfusions are used to treat severe anemia.

COVID- 19 and Sickle Cell Disease

COVID-19 is a new and contagious disease that is caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). You can become infected from respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs, talks, or sneezes. You can become infected by coming into close contact with person who has COVID-19. It is primarily spread from person to person. The virus is also present on surfaces. Not all individuals have symptoms (asymptomatic) but they can still spread the virus. Individuals may exhibit symptoms 2 to 14 days after exposure. Symptoms may include fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath, fatigue, muscle aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, runny nose or congestion, nausea or vomiting, and diarrhea.

People with SCD are at increased risk of severe illness from the virus that causes COVID-19. People with SCD may have a weaker immune system, making it harder to fight the virus.

Recommendations to Stay Healthy:

Individuals with SCD must follow general guidelines to keep their immune system strong. It is recommended that people with Sickle Cell Disease:

- Avoid vaso-occlusive episodes or pain crises by avoiding possible triggers
- Always wear a mask or face covering that covers the nose and mouth whenever in public places
- Maintain a 6 feet distance from others
- Do not have contact with anyone who is ill.
- Avoid crowds and large public gatherings to avoid people who are ill but do not yet have symptoms
- Only go out for essential reasons as health care appointments, pick up medications, groceries.
- Postpone vacations and other personal trips
- Wash hands frequently for at least 20 seconds and rinse well, use hand sanitizers and gloves if appropriate.
- Avoid touching your nose and mouth.
- Regularly clean and disinfect objects and surfaces in your home.
- Limit visitors.
- Talk with your health care provider about recommended vaccines. For example, influenza or flu vaccine, Hepatitis B and pneumococcal (to protect against pneumonia).

South Carolina Resources

- James R. Clark Memorial Sickle Cell Foundation
  1420 Gregg St., Columbia SC
  800-506-1273
- L.D. Barksdale Sickle Cell Anemia Foundation
  645 South Church St., Spartanburg SC
  864-582-9420
- Orangeburg Area Sickle Cell Foundation
  825 Summers Ave., Orangeburg SC
  803-534-1716
- COBRA Human Services Agency Sickle Cell Program
  3962 Rivers Ave., Charleston SC
  800-354-4704

References

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Midlands of South Carolina
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