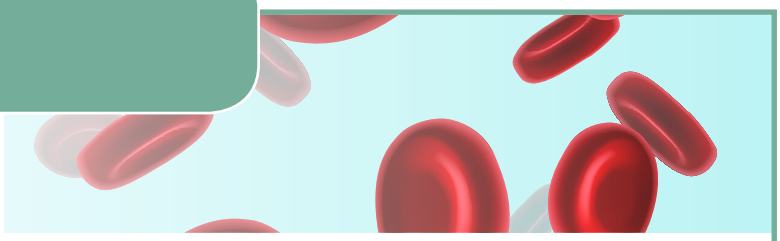
Sickle Cell Disease
Tips for Healthy Living



5 Tips To Help Prevent Infection

Common illnesses, like the flu, can quickly become dangerous for a person with sickle cell disease. The best defense is to take simple steps to help prevent infections.

1. Washing Hands. Washing your hands is one of the best ways to help prevent getting an infection. People with sickle cell disease, their family, and other caretakers should wash their hands with soap and clean water many times each day. If you don't have soap and water, you can use gel hand cleaners with alcohol in them.

Times to wash your hands:

BEFORE

- Making food
- Eating

AFTER

- Using the bathroom
- Blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
- Shaking hands
- Touching people or things that can carry germs, such as:
  - Diapers or a child who has used the toilet
  - Food that is not cooked (raw meat, raw eggs, or unwashed vegetables)
  - Animals or animal waste
  - Trash
  - A sick person

2. Food Safety. A bacteria, called salmonella, in some foods can be especially harmful to children with sickle cell disease. How to stay safe when cooking and eating:

- Wash hands, cutting boards, counters, knives, and other utensils after they touch uncooked foods.
- Wash vegetables and fruit well before eating them.
- Cook meat until it's well done. The juices should run clear and there should be no pink inside.
- Do not eat raw or undercooked eggs. Raw eggs might be hiding in homemade hollandaise sauce, Caesar and other homemade salad dressings, tiramisu, homemade ice cream, homemade mayonnaise, cookie doughs, and frostings.
- Do not eat raw or unpasteurized milk or other dairy products (cheeses). Make sure these foods have a label that says they are "pasteurized."

3. Avoid Reptiles. A bacteria, called salmonella, that some reptiles have can be especially harmful to children with sickle cell disease. Make sure children stay away from turtles, snakes, and lizards.

4. Vaccines. Vaccines are a great way to prevent many serious infections. Children and adults with sickle cell disease should get all recommended vaccinations, including a yearly influenza (flu) vaccination for those aged 6 months and older. People with sickle cell disease are considered "high risk" for certain infections and should follow a special vaccination schedule for the following vaccines:

Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib)

Pneumococcal vaccines

Meningococcal vaccines

For information on the most up-to-date vaccination schedules, visit: https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules/. Pay special attention to the footnotes that provide special instructions for people with sickle cell disease.

5. Penicillin. Penicillin can help prevent infections. Take penicillin (or other antibiotic prescribed by a doctor) every day until at least 5 years of age.

For more information, please visit www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/sicklecell

National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities
Office of the Director

CS263755C