

Haematology Department

Living with Sickle Cell Disease – Prevention of Infection

Information for parents and carers

Introduction

This leaflet aims to provide you with general information about living with Sickle Cell Disease. If you are ever worried about your child please contact your Sickle Cell Team or take your child to the Accident and Emergency Department.

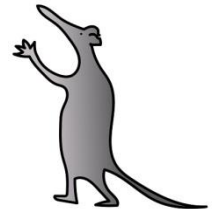
Why is preventing infection important in Sickle Cell Disease?

People with Sickle Cell disease are more prone to catching infections like pneumococcal, meningitis, osteomyelitis, salmonella and septicaemia. These infections can be serious and even life-threatening. This is because the spleen (an organ in the body) functions as a filter to remove bacteria from the blood stream, helping the body fight infections. Sickle Cells damage the spleen by blocking it, so that it doesn't function normally, allowing bacteria to grow in the bloodstream.

Some infections can be minor and not pose any problems to your child. Bacterial infections, particularly those caused by Pneumococcal and Haemophilus influenza bugs are serious. They can cause septicaemia and can be life-threatening or even fatal, if not treated early enough. Children under the age of five years are at the highest risk.

What are the signs of infection?

- Temperature above 38 °C
- Shaking & shivering. This is known as a rigor.
- Chills
- Nausea (feeling sick)
- Rash
- Cough
- Localised pain (pain to a particular area)



What should I do if I think my child has an infection?

If your child has any of the symptoms above, take your child to the hospital to be seen in the Accident and Emergency Department. Temperatures are a medical emergency. If your child has a temperature they must be reviewed straight away. If your child has a temperature, give them a dose of Paracetamol (if they haven't already had some in the last previous four hours), to help bring the temperature down.

How can I prevent my child catching an infection?

It may not be possible to completely prevent your child getting an infection. There are a number of things that you can do that can reduce the chances of your child getting an infection:

Good Hygiene Good hygiene can help to prevent infections.
Ensure that your child washes their hands regularly.

Penicillin Giving your child Penicillin medicine twice a day has been shown to reduce their chance of catching pneumococcal infections

Immunisations Make sure that your child gets all their recommended immunisations.

What immunisations should my child have?

Your child should receive all their routine childhood immunisations at the ages recommended. In addition to those immunisations your child will need additional vaccines that your sickle cell team will advise you about and let your primary health care team know when they are due.

The extra vaccines are:

- Flu vaccine (influenza vaccine) every year after six months of age. Everyone in the household should also get this immunisation every year.
- Pneumococcal vaccine (called Pneumovax) at two years of age and a booster every five years after that.
- Hepatitis B.
- Meningitis ACWY
- Meningitis B (if your child has not received this as part of their routine immunisations)

Further information

If you have any questions or want any further information please contact your Sickle Cell Team on 0151 252 5070.

Useful websites

www.alderhey.co.uk

www.sicklecellsociety.co.uk



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This leaflet only gives general information. You must always discuss the individual treatment of your child with the appropriate member of staff. Do not rely on this leaflet alone for information about your child's treatment.

This information can be made available in other languages and formats if requested.

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Review Date: April 2024

PIAG: 0075

