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Haematology Department

**Sickle Cell Disease – Chronic Complications**

**Anaemia**

Information for parents and carers

**Introduction**

This leaflet is designed to explain about the long term (chronic) complications of sickle cell disease. The information does not cover everything. If you are ever worried about your child then please contact your Sickle Cell Team or take your child to Accident and Emergency Department.

**What is anaemia?**

Anaemia is when the amount of red blood cells (haemoglobin) is lower than they should be. The job of the red blood cells is to get oxygen from the lungs and transport it around the body distributing it to muscles and tissues.

**Why is my child anaemic?**

Red blood cells usually last for about 120 days. Sickle red blood cells last for about 30-40 days. The body is continually making red blood cells and because sickle red blood cells die off quickly the body cannot make enough red blood cells to replace them. This means that people with sickle cell disease become anaemic. It is a natural part of the condition.

**How will I know my child's haemoglobin level?**

Your child's haemoglobin level will be checked when they attend clinic. This will give us a baseline level so we know what your child's haemoglobin level is when they are well. If your child comes into hospital unwell their haemoglobin level will be checked to see if it has dropped.

**Should I know what my child's usual haemoglobin is?**

It is important to keep a record of your child's haemoglobin level in case you need to attend another hospital. You will be able to tell the doctors their usual haemoglobin.

**What complications can anaemia cause?**

Somebody with sickle cell disease always has some level of anaemia. Their haemoglobin is around 60g/l -100g/l, the normal level in a child is 120g/l or above. As they are always anaemic their bodies become use to running on that level of anaemia. It is when the level drops below what is usual for your child that complications can arise.

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The main complications of anaemia are:

* Tiredness or getting tired more easily after activities
* Breathlessness
* Heart murmurs as the heart has to work harder to pump the blood around the body

**Can my child become more anaemic than usual?**

There are times when your child may be more anaemic than normal. This usually happens when your child has a temperature or infection or during a crisis episode.

**What symptoms will my child have if they are becoming more anaemic than usual?**

Your child may complain of one or more of these symptoms:

* Temperature
* Headaches
* Paleness
* Tiredness
* Increased breathlessness
* Yellow eyes or skin
* Dark urine

**What should I do if my child seems more anaemic that usual?**

Very low haemoglobin can be dangerous for your child. If you notice that your child is showing any of the signs of becoming more anaemic then you should bring your child to hospital

**What is the treatment for anaemia?**

Your child's anaemia will not be treated unless they are unwell and their haemoglobin falls 20g/l below what is normal for them or have worsening symptoms. If this happens then your child will receive a blood transfusion.

**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](http://www.alderhey.co.uk)

[www.sicklecellsociety.co.uk](http://www.sicklecellsociety.co.uk)

Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust is neither liable for the contents of any external internet site listed, nor does it endorse any commercial product or service mentioned or advised on any of the sites.

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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