

# June 19, 2015 is Sickle Cell Awareness Day

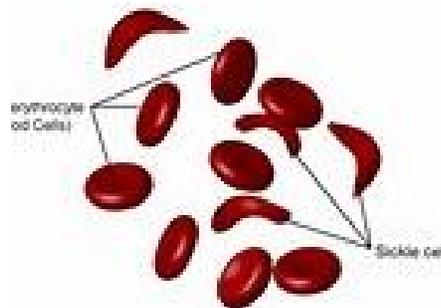
To increase public awareness of Sickle Cell Disease (SCD) and its potential complications, the **Louisiana State Board of Nursing** is proudly participating in Sickle Cell Awareness Day through the sharing of information about the disease and trait.

## DID YOU KNOW?

SCD affects millions of people throughout the world? The exact number of people living with SCD in the United States is unknown, but it is estimated that SCD occurs in approximately 1 out of every 500 Black or African-American births; SCD occurs in approximately 1 out of every 36,000 Hispanic-American births, and Sickle Cell Trait (SCT) occurs in approximately 1 in 12 Blacks or African-Americans. Sickle cell disease affects millions of people throughout the world and is particularly common among people whose ancestors come from sub-Saharan Africa, Spanish-speaking regions in the Western Hemisphere (South America, Cuba, and Central America), Saudi Arabia, India, and Mediterranean countries such as Turkey, Greece, and Italy. This is why hospitals in the United States screen all newborn babies for sickle cell disease.



## WHAT IS SICKLE CELL?



SCD is a group of inherited red blood cell disorders. Healthy red blood cells are **round**, and they carry oxygen to all parts of the body. In someone who has SCD, the red blood cells become hard and sticky and look like a farm tool called a “sickle.” A normal red blood cell lives about 120 days, but sickle cells die early, which causes a constant shortage of red blood cells. Also, when sickle cells travel through small blood vessels, they get stuck and clog the blood flow. This can cause pain and other serious problems such as infection, acute chest syndrome and stroke. SCD is a genetic condition that is present at birth. It is inherited when a child receives two sickle cell genes—one from each parent.

People who have sickle cell trait (SCT) inherit one sickle cell gene from one parent and one normal gene from the other parent. People with SCT usually do not have any of the signs of the disease, but they can pass the trait on to their children.

## HOW CAN SOME OF THE COMPLICATIONS BE AVOIDED?

There are many complications of SCD, the most common is severe pain crisis caused when sickle cells get stuck in small blood vessels. There are simple steps that people with SCD can take to help prevent and reduce the number of pain crises they experience:

- Drink plenty of water.
- Try not to get too hot or too cold.
- Try to avoid places or situations that expose you to high altitudes (for example, flying, mountain climbing, or cities with a high altitude).
- Try to avoid places or situations that expose you to low oxygen levels (for example, mountain climbing or exercising extremely hard, such as in military boot camp or when training for an athletic competition).
- Adults with severe SCD can take a medicine called *hydroxyurea* to help reduce the number of pain crises. People taking hydroxyurea must be checked often by a doctor because the medicine can cause serious side effects, including an increased risk of dangerous infections.
- New research has shown that babies and children with SCD also benefit from hydroxyurea.

Although there is no cure for SCD, several emerging new treatments are currently being evaluated, such as stem cell transplants and gene therapy. A promising statistic is that sickle cell-related deaths among African-American children younger than 4 years of age fell by 42% from 1999 through 2002. This drop coincided with the introduction of a vaccine that protects against invasive pneumococcal disease.

For more information, view the Self-Care Toolkit available through the Centers for Disease Control at [http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/sicklecell/documents/livingwell-with-sickle-cell-disease\\_self-caretoolkit.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/sicklecell/documents/livingwell-with-sickle-cell-disease_self-caretoolkit.pdf)

Pass this information on to your loved ones.

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Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2014, January 16). *Sickle Cell Disease*. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/sicklecell/facts.html>