

Vaccinations and Antibiotics: Information for Adults with Sickle Cell Disease

This leaflet provides information and advice on vaccinations and antibiotics for patients with sickle cell disease. If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to your sickle cell doctors or specialist nurse.

Why do I need vaccinations or antibiotics?

The spleen is a small organ on the left side of your abdomen. It forms part of your immune system and protects you from infections. In the majority of people with sickle cell disease, the spleen stops functioning during childhood. When this happens, it increases your risk of becoming unwell if infected with certain types of bacteria, and can lead to severe infections, such as meningitis and pneumonia. You will also be more prone to developing severe illness from viruses, such as influenza (flu) and malaria.

For these reasons, it is strongly recommended that everyone with sickle cell disease receives certain vaccinations. Life-long preventative antibiotics are also recommended for some people.

Which vaccinations should I have?

It is recommended that all patients with sickle cell disease have the following vaccinations (in addition to those recommended as part of the routine vaccination programme in the UK):

- **Pneumococcal vaccine:** You should receive this every five years. Your immunity might be checked in the sickle cell clinic when you attend for annual review and a booster dose advised if your body has not developed immunity.
- **Seasonal flu vaccine:** You are advised to get this every year from your GP.
- **Hepatitis B vaccine:** This is advised for all patients who are on a blood transfusion programme. Your immunity will be checked in the sickle cell clinic during your annual review and a booster dose may be advised. This may be given in the day unit or clinic or arranged with your GP. Your doctor will advise you on this.

You may be advised to have other vaccines, such as meningococcal ACWY and B or Haemophilus Influenzae type B if you have not had them before. Your doctor will give you further information about these if required.

Your haematologist will do blood tests during your clinic visit and advise on which vaccinations are due, but it does help if you can also keep your own record of your vaccinations.

Which antibiotics should I have?

It is difficult to know how long adults should continue their antibiotics to help prevent these infections. We know that it is difficult to take antibiotics every day long term and if they can't be taken every day then it may be more sensible to not take them at all. If you are able to continue taking them without difficulty then please do continue to take them.

However we do know that it is particularly important that you take regular antibiotics to help prevent infection if:

- you are over 50 years of age
- you have not responded adequately to the pneumococcal vaccine
- you have not had the pneumococcal vaccine
- you have had previous pneumococcal infections.

The first choice of antibiotic is penicillin V 250mg twice daily. You may be prescribed an alternative (usually erythromycin 250mg twice daily) if you are allergic to penicillin or to antibiotics similar to penicillin. Please make sure you let your doctor know if you have any allergies to any medications.

In order for preventative antibiotics to be effective, it is recommended that you take them every day. Some people forget or decide only to take the antibiotics when they are ill, which is not advisable. Please ensure that you do not run out – always arrange to get a new supply from your doctor before you run out completely.

If you are struggling to take your antibiotics every day, please follow the tips below:

- Speak to a member of the sickle cell team about why you are finding it difficult to remember to take your antibiotics. They may be able to offer you important advice.
- Put a reminder on your mobile phone for when you are due to take your antibiotics.
- Make taking your antibiotics part of your daily routine. To help you to remember to take your medication every day, you could put your antibiotics

next to your toothbrush or in a visible place near your bed so that you see them when going about your daily tasks.

Important note

If you do not take regular antibiotics, it is important that you have a supply for emergency use. If you develop a fever (temperature $\geq 38^{\circ}\text{C}$), you should contact your GP or sickle cell team, as you may have an infection.

Contact us

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Dr Elizabeth Rhodes (sickle cell and thalassaemia consultant): Tel: 020 8725 0885

Sickle cell and thalassaemia secretary Tel: 020 8725 0885

Useful sources of information

Sickle Cell Society Tel: 020 8861 7795

Website: www.sicklecellsociety.org

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough wings (near the lift foyer).

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency.

NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111

AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all of our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website (www.accessable.co.uk). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.



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