

Preventing Infection

Patients with sickle cell disease (SCD), especially Hb SS and Hb Sβ0 thalassemia are at increased risk of life-threatening infections. This is because the immune system in patients with SCD does not function normally. This allows bacteria (germs) to grow in the blood and can lead to serious infections especially in young children. Serious infections can cause disability and death.

The table below shows some of the bacteria (germs) that cause major problems in persons with sickle cell disease and how to prevent these problems.

<p>STREPTOCOCCUS PNEUMONIAE (Pneumococcus)</p>	<p>This bacterium (germ) causes serious infections including infection of the blood and of the lining of the brain. Patients with Hb SS & Hb Sβ0 thalassemia are given penicillin – Penadur (injection every 28 days) or Penicillin V (medicine to take by mouth twice daily) – from age 4 months to at least age 4 years to prevent infection with this germ. If taken regularly, penicillin is extremely effective in reducing the risk of infection and death.</p> <p>If you are allergic to penicillin – don't worry – there are other options.</p> <p>Pneumococcal vaccines also help prevent infections.</p> <p>PCV – given at age 2, 4, and 6 months with a booster at age 15 months</p> <p>Pneumovax – given at age 4 years with a single life-time booster after 5 years.</p>
<p>HAEMOPHILUS INFLUENZAE TYPE B (HIB)</p>	<p>This is another bacterium (germ) that can cause serious infection and death in sickle cell patients.</p> <p>A vaccine is available to help prevent infection with HIB. It is given at age 2, 4, and 6 months with a booster at age 15 months.</p>
<p>SALMONELLA</p>	<p>This is a bacterium (germ) that causes bone and blood infection in sickle cell patients. Most infections occur as a result of eating infected food like chicken and eggs, although you can get it in other ways.</p> <p>To prevent salmonella infection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cook all meats (especially chicken) thoroughly. • No raw or undercooked eggs (e.g. soft-boiled or “scald” eggs). • Wash all utensils and dishes properly after using with raw meats. • Practice proper hand washing before handling / eating food and after using the bathroom. • No unusual pets (e.g. turtles and lizards).

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HEPATITIS B

This is a virus (another type of germ) that can cause long-term illness that leads to liver disease (cirrhosis), liver cancer and death. It is spread through contact with the blood and body fluids of an infected person (e.g. having unprotected sex, sharing needles and blood transfusions). **Hepatitis B vaccine** can prevent infection. You will need 3 doses of the vaccine for full immunization.

Signs and symptoms of infection

include:

- Fever greater than 38°C/101°F
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Pale colour of the tongue or lips
- Markedly increased jaundice (yellowing of the eyes)
- Weakness or unusual tiredness
- Unusual pain crises

If you note **any** signs or symptoms of infection you should go to your nearest doctor or hospital as soon as possible.

The earlier treatment is given the better, however, even with treatment permanent disability and death can occur.

INFECTIONS IN SICKLE CELL DISEASE CAN CAUSE SERIOUS PROBLEMS AND CAN OFTEN BE PREVENTED.

1. Ensure all immunisations are up to date
2. Practice good hygiene
3. Cook all foods thoroughly
4. BE ALERT for signs / symptoms

SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION EARLY!

Ask your doctor for further information.

