

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 receive 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 recommended 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 details:

If you have any questions or concerns about issues raised in this guidance, your medicines, or other queries on your health, please speak to the staff caring for you in your local centre.

Each team to please insert your centres contact details here:

Additional contacts can be found on the STSTN website (www.ststn.co.uk)

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