

When should adults with sickle cell disease attend the A&E Department at St Thomas' Hospital?

This leaflet provides you with information about when you need to go to the A&E Department at St Thomas' Hospital if you have sickle cell disease and what will happen when you are there.

If you recognise that your condition is getting worse at home and you have time, ask a friend or carer to pack a bag of essentials, such as overnight clothing, toiletries and any medicines you are taking at the moment.

How do I get to A&E?

In an extreme emergency, it is essential that you dial 999 and call an ambulance. However, in most cases the ambulance will only take you to your nearest A&E Department to ensure that you are treated as quickly and safely as possible.

If it is not an extreme emergency and your condition allows, you should travel to St Thomas' A&E using your usual means of transport, or public transport.

What should I do when I get to St Thomas' Hospital A&E?

1) Take a ticket

Take a ticket and tell the receptionist you have sickle cell disease (SCD).

2) Registration

Take a seat in one of the four red chairs in front of the receptionist. A receptionist will call you to register you. If you are having a crisis and pain, and are unwell, you should be sent straight to the treatment area. This will help to speed up your assessment so that you can receive painkillers in good time. The receptionist will complete your registration form.

When should I go to St Thomas' Hospital A&E?

Pain

Pain is the most common symptom of SCD and you should have painkillers at home to help relieve it. However, you need to go to A&E if you experience any of the following symptoms:

- pain which does not settle with your usual painkillers
- pain which is more severe than usual or is getting more severe despite the painkillers
- pain which is severe and is different to your usual pain
- a high fever
- shortness of breath or difficulty in breathing.

If you have severe pain, you can also call the Acute Pain Service for SCD at Guy's Hospital during working hours. Contact details can be found at the end of this leaflet.

Acute chest syndrome

Acute chest syndrome is a very serious complication of SCD that requires prompt hospital treatment. The symptoms and signs can develop very rapidly over a short period of time (within a few hours). Don't wait for all the symptoms listed below to develop. You should go to the A&E Department if you develop **any** of these symptoms:

- shortness of breath
- difficulty in breathing and coughing
- rapid/fast breathing
- severe pain in the chest or upper abdomen
- severe pain in the upper part of the spine
- a high fever with a temperature above 39.0° C
- rapid/fast pulse rate.

Stroke

Sickling in the brain can cause a stroke. A stroke happens due to a blood clot or bleeding into the brain, which causes brain cells to die. The signs of a stroke may only last a few hours but must not be ignored. Early treatment saves lives and increases the chance of making a better recovery.

What are the signs of a stroke?

The Face-Arm-Speech-Test (FAST)

Three simple checks can help you recognise whether you or someone has had a stroke or mini-stroke:

Facial Weakness: Can you/the person smile? Has their mouth or an eye drooped?

Arm Weakness: Can you/the person raise both arms?

Speech problems: Can you/the person speak clearly and understand what you say?

Test these symptoms.

If you see any of these signs, call 999 immediately.

Priapism

Priapism is a painful erection of the penis which often starts in the early hours of the morning. It is a common problem in male patients with SCD, especially in teenagers and young adults. It occurs in two forms:

1. **Stuttering episodes** which last two to four hours but often come back and may turn into a severe attack. Recurrent stuttering episodes should be evaluated in a haematology outpatient clinic. If you are concerned about stuttering priapism, please contact one of the clinical nurse specialists who can help arrange a medical review if required.
2. **Severe attacks** which last longer than four hours and can result in impotence (difficulties in getting a normal erection). If you experience priapism lasting longer than two hours and if you notice associated symptoms such as fever, difficulty passing urine, dehydration or pain in other parts of your body, you need to go to A&E.

If you are embarrassed or worried about privacy, please ask for a male doctor or nurse to examine you.

What happens normally when I attend St Thomas' Hospital A&E?

You will be seen initially by a triage nurse. He/she will assess the level of your pain and your physical condition to help prioritise your treatment according to the seriousness of your condition. The nurse will also check your vital signs, such as blood pressure, pulse, temperature and oxygen levels. This is essential so that the doctors can diagnose and treat you promptly and safely.

Once you have been seen by the triage nurse, a doctor working in A&E will ask you about your medical history and examine you. He/she will also give you any immediate treatment required, including fluids, pain relief, oxygen and antibiotics.

It is important that you allow the doctor to examine you and complete any tests, such as bloods tests, as they can show the cause of your SCD crisis and detect major complications quickly. The doctors and nurses in A&E will always follow guidelines created by your sickle cell team to help them manage your sickle cell complications.

When you arrive at St Thomas' A&E, it is helpful if you know the following information:

- your sickle cell diagnosis (for example HbSS)
- what painkillers you have taken and the last time you took them
- details of your current medicines
- your normal haemoglobin level and oxygen levels
- what you normally take as pain relief in hospital
- what complications you have experienced in the past, both sickle cell and non-sickle cell.

How quickly will I get pain relief?

We will aim to get your pain relief within 30 minutes of arriving and pain control within two hours for acute sickle cell pain.

Most patients with SCD registered at Guy's and St Thomas' will have an individual care plan for their painkiller (analgesia) needs in the A&E department. If you would like to see your care plan or discuss any changes that are needed, please contact your sickle cell nurse at Guy's and St Thomas'.

If you experience a problem in A&E, please ensure that you discuss this with a member of the sickle cell team so that they can assist in addressing your concerns.

Will I see a member of the sickle cell team in A&E?

For most of the time when you are in A&E, you will be looked after by the department's team of doctors and nurses. However, if you have a major complication or problems with your pain control, the A&E team can contact a member of the SCD team at any time for advice and assessment.

How and when will I be admitted to hospital?

You will usually be admitted to hospital if your pain fails to settle quickly, you are dehydrated, have a fever or low oxygen levels, or because you need specific treatment, such as strong pain relief, oxygen or intravenous antibiotics or fluids.

You will also be admitted to hospital if the doctor is worried that you are at risk of developing, or have developed, a major complication of SCD. You will usually be admitted by the attending medical or surgical team and they will contact the sickle cell team to take over your care if appropriate the next day.

Where in hospital will I stay?

If your pain or crisis is not severe, you will normally be admitted to the Clinical Decision Unit. In cases of severe crisis or complications, you will usually be admitted to a medical ward at Guy's Hospital.

What should I do after I have left A&E?

Please ensure that you feel well enough to manage your pain and condition at home with your normal pain relief and strategies, such as rest and drinking fluids. It is important that you have enough pain relief or other essential treatments so that you can continue to care for yourself at home. In most cases, the A&E Department will supply you with enough medicines to last you until you can see your GP.

If your symptoms do not settle, please see your GP or contact a member of the sickle cell nursing team for follow-up and advice. If your symptoms are severe, it is essential that you come back to the A&E Department.

Contact us

If you would like more information about the Sickle Cell Service for adults and adolescents, please contact a member of our SCD team, as listed below. To bleep a member of the team, call the hospital switchboard on 020 7188 7188 and ask for the bleep desk. Ask for the relevant bleep number and wait for a response. This will connect you to the team member directly.

- Mr Neil Westerdale, advanced nurse practitioner
Tel: 020 7188 2710 **Mob:** 07770 683 947 **Bleep:** 1843
- Mr Luhangha Musumadi, clinical nurse specialist – adolescents
Tel: 020 7188 2710 **Mob:** 07770 678 851 **Bleep:** 2256
- Mrs Judith St Hilaire, clinical nurse specialist
Tel: 020 7188 2710 **Mob:** 07901 510 805 **Bleep:** 2868
- Dr Nicky Veronica Thomas, head of psychological services/consultant health psychologist
Tel: 020 7188 2725
- Dr Heather Rawle, consultant clinical/health psychologist
Tel: 020 7188 2718
- Mina Abedian, health psychologist
Tel: 020 7188 2718

If you have severe pain, please call the Acute Pain Service for SCD at Guy's Hospital on 020 7188 2727 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm).

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

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

To make comments or raise concerns about the Trust's services, please contact PALS. Ask a member of staff to direct you to the PALS office or:

e: 020 7188 8801 at St Thomas' **t:** 020 7188 8803 at Guy's **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

Language Support Services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch using the following contact details.

t: 020 7188 8815 **fax:** 020 7188 5953

NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

t: 111

NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

w: www.nhs.uk

Become a member of your local hospitals, and help shape our future

Membership is free and it is completely up to you how much you get involved. To become a member of our Foundation Trust, you need to be 18 years of age or over, live in Lambeth, Southwark, Lewisham, Wandsworth or Westminster or have been a patient at either hospital in the last five years.

To join, please call 0848 143 4017, email members@gstt.nhs.uk or visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk