

# WHAT CAN BE DONE TO SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH SICKLE CELL DISEASE?

**TEACHERS, NURSES AND ADMINISTRATORS CAN:**

## 01 HYDRATION

Students with SCD require more water than the average person. A filled water bottle must be with the student at all times- yes, even during testing and around computers. Take necessary precautions to prevent spills as needed. Students need to be encouraged to drink water constantly as dehydration can cause pain.

## 02 BATHROOM BREAKS

Children with SCD produce large amounts of dilute urine even when they are dehydrated. Thus, children with SCD may need to go to the bathroom more often than other children. Do not restrict students with SCD from bathroom breaks. Provide a special bathroom pass to limit disruptions in instruction and to minimize attention drawn to the student exiting the classroom.

## 03 WEATHER

Cold or hot weather can trigger pain crises. Teachers should not assign a student with SCD a seat in drafty locations, directly in front of fans or under air conditioner vents.

Permit layered clothing in the classroom. Remind students with SCD to wear a jacket outside during cold or rainy weather or to take off a layer of clothing when it is hot. Children with SCD should not exercise in extreme conditions (e.g., avoid cold and high heat and humidity).

## 04 BE RESPONSIVE TO COMPLAINTS OF PAIN

## 05 BE ALERT FOR SIGNS OF FEVER

## 06 WATCH FOR SIGNS OF STROKE

## 07 ALLOW ACCOMMODATIONS DURING PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND RECESS ACTIVITIES

## 08 MAINTAIN OPEN COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS

# Tips for SUPPORTING STUDENTS with Sickle Cell Disease



The purpose of this brochure is to describe sickle cell disease and provide tips for teachers, nurses, and school administrators.

## GET IN TOUCH!

**MTS SICKLE CELL FOUNDATION, INC.**

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[www.MyThreeSicklers.org](http://www.MyThreeSicklers.org)  
Social Media: @MyThreeSickers

Find more tips here: [bit.ly/2pP0kIX](http://bit.ly/2pP0kIX)

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## WHAT IS SICKLE CELL DISEASE?

Sickle cell disease (SCD) is an inherited blood disorder (a blood disorder that runs in families). People with SCD produce an abnormal type of hemoglobin (called hemoglobin S (HbS) or sickle hemoglobin). Hemoglobin is a protein in red blood cells that carries oxygen from the lungs to the organs and tissues in the body. The abnormal hemoglobin in SCD can cause the red blood cells to have a sickle or banana shape under certain conditions. People with SCD often have a decreased number of red blood cells, a condition called anemia, which can cause lack of energy, breathlessness, and pale color of the skin and lips.



## SICKLE CELL DISEASE IN THE UNITED STATES

In the United States, SCD is most commonly found among people of African descent; however, people of all races and ethnicities can have SCD. About 1 in every 365 African-

American babies in the United States is born with SCD; and worldwide, approximately 300,000 babies are born with SCD each year. As more people move from areas highly affected by SCD to the United States, schools will become more diverse and there is a higher chance that teachers will encounter a student with SCD in their classrooms. As with any student with a chronic health condition, students with SCD may experience health problems during the school day.

## HOW DOES SICKLE CELL DISEASE AFFECT PEOPLE?

While normal red blood cells are round like donuts and move freely through blood vessels, sickled blood cells clog the flow of blood and can break apart as they move through blood vessels. Additionally, sickled red blood cells do not deliver oxygen throughout the body as well as normal red blood cells do. As a result people living with sickle cell disease may suffer with:

- Severe pain
- Low number of red blood cells (or anemia)
- Stroke

## WHAT CONDITIONS CAN CAUSE SEVERE PAIN (SICKLE CELL DISEASE CRISIS)?

One of the biggest challenges posed by SCD is the unpredictable nature of pain and the wide-ranging severity of health problems due to the condition. Some people with SCD may have infrequent problems with pain, whereas others experiencing pain may require hospitalization.

*Certain factors are more likely to trigger a painful sickle cell crisis:*

- Infections
- Cold and/or damp conditions
- Air pollution
- Dehydration
- Extreme physical activity
- Stress
- Sudden changes in temperature
- Use of alcohol or caffeine
- Smoking