

Prevention

Ways to decrease your risk of STDs:

- Don't have sex.
- If you do have sex, use a condom every time.
- Commit to having one sex partner.
- Ask your sex partner if they have an STD. Keep in mind: Your partner may not be truthful or may not know that they are infected.
- Limit the number of sex partners that you have.
- Learn the symptoms of STDs. Keep in mind: Some STDs do not always have symptoms that you can see. Protect yourself.
- Have regular check-ups that include STD testing.
- Avoid alcohol (beer, liquor) and drugs, which can impair your judgment and lead to unplanned sex. Remember: Even drinking, smoking, and using drugs once in a while can lead to severe sickle cell complications.
- Ask for more facts from sickle cell staff members.



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ATTENTION: If you speak another language, assistance services, free of charge, are available to you. Call 1-866-278-5833 (TTY: 1-901-595-1040).

ATENCIÓN: si habla español, tiene a su disposición servicios gratuitos de asistencia lingüística. Llame al 1-866-278-5833 (TTY: 1-901-595-1040).

تنبيه: إذا كنت تتحدث باللغة العربية فيمكنك الاستعانة بخدمات المساعدة اللغوية المتوفرة لك مجاناً. يرجى الاتصال بالرقم 866 - 278 - 5833 (الهاتف النصي: 1-901-595-1040).

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This document is not intended to take the place of the care and attention of your personal physician. Our goal is to promote active participation in your care and treatment by providing information and education. Questions about individual health concerns or specific treatment options should be discussed with your physician. For more general information on sickle cell disease, please visit our Web site at www.stjude.org/sicklecell.

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Sickle Cell Disease and Sexuality



Sexual Feelings

You might be embarrassed talking about sex. Even so, thinking about it is a normal part of growing up. No matter how you feel about sex, before you take part in any kind of sexual acts, you need to know about diseases that can be spread during sex and about birth control.

Several diseases can be spread when people have sex. They are called sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). These diseases are common in teenagers and young adults. Some teens today are having sex at an early age. They may even have more than one sex partner, and they are not always using protection. For these reasons, STDs are a growing problem in people under the age of 25.

Pregnancy

Teens and young adults with sickle cell disease can make and have babies. If you choose to have sex and you do not want to have children, you must use birth control. Both males and females need to think about birth control. The only form of birth control that will prevent both pregnancy and STDs is a condom with a spermicide. A condom looks like a long balloon that is placed over a man's penis. Spermicide is a foam, cream, or jelly, which contains chemicals that kill sperm. Don't count on your partner to be truthful about using birth control or having an STD. Protect yourself. Always use a condom with spermicide. If your partner is not sure whether they have an STD, encourage them to get tested.

Hydroxyurea

Hydroxyurea is a drug used to help decrease pain crises in people with sickle cell disease. The long-term effects of hydroxyurea on an unborn child are not known. If you plan on starting a family, talk to your doctor about stopping hydroxyurea. This drug should not be taken during or right before pregnancy. If you are pregnant, stop taking hydroxyurea and contact your doctor right away.

Birth Control

If you have sickle cell disease and are having sex, we suggest you use one of these birth control methods if you want to prevent pregnancy:

- Condoms with a spermicide
- Diaphragm and spermicide (a rubber shield that a woman places in her vagina)
- Spermicide used with a condom or diaphragm (placed in the vagina or in a condom)
- Depo-Provera (a hormone shot that a woman gets every 3 months)
- Low-dose birth control pills (hormone pills that a woman must take each day)

Remember: The only method that helps prevent both pregnancy and STDs is a condom with a spermicide. For these to work well, you must use them every time you have sex.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

STDs are diseases that can be passed from one person to another during sexual acts. Keep in mind that your partner may not know that they have an STD.

A teenager with sickle cell disease has an increased risk of infection. Some STDs can increase that risk even more. Avoid STDs by not having sex or by using protection every time you have sex.

HIV

The human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) destroys the body's ability to fight off illness. People with HIV are more likely to get serious infections. HIV infection can lead to acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS).

AIDS

AIDS is deadly and currently has no cure. Certain drugs can control HIV symptoms in some people. Even so, people with HIV can still get serious infections that can lead to death.

Chlamydia

This is the most common STD. You can get chlamydia if you have vaginal, oral, or anal sex with someone who has it. You can get it anytime you have sex. This disease has a cure, but it can still have serious long-term side effects if not treated.

Possible symptoms:

- Need to urinate more often
- Burning when urinating
- Unusual discharge from penis or vagina
- For women, pain in abdomen or bleeding between periods or after sex

Sometimes, a person with chlamydia will have no symptoms.

Other STDs

- Genital herpes
- Gonorrhea
- Syphilis
- Genital warts

All of these can be treated. However, some can lead to chronic illness and can be spread to future partners.

