

## News release

Tuesday July 5, 2011  
For immediate release

### **NHS highlights sickle cell issues**

AFRICAN and Caribbean residents in the city are being encouraged to get tested for a serious blood disorder.

NHS Leicester City is supporting a drive to get people in the city tested for sickle cell disease as part of national Sickle Cell Awareness Month which runs throughout July.

In 2010 more than 20 people who were admitted to hospital were tested positive for sickle cell disease in the city. Those with the disease are at risk of developing heart problems, bad circulation and kidney problems. In children the condition can lead to a stroke.

Sickle cell disease actually refers to a group of conditions. The most serious and common of them is sickle cell anaemia. Most people affected by sickle cell anaemia are either of African or Caribbean origin.

A public health spokesperson for NHS Leicester City, said: "A simple blood test is all that is needed to diagnose the illness. A small amount of blood is taken from your arm and sent away for testing. The test is quick and almost painless.

"It's important couples from African and Caribbean cultures who are thinking about starting a family get tested. If both parents carry the disease there is a one in four chance of the baby contracting the illness."

Sickle cell anaemia affects red blood cells. Healthy red blood cells are disc shaped, flexible, and move easily through blood vessels. They contain a protein which helps carry oxygen around the body.

In people with sickle cell anaemia red blood cells are turned into crescent shapes. These can get stuck in blood vessels and block the flow of blood to the rest of the body.

To get tested people must be registered with a GP. To register with a GP contact NHS Leicester City customer services team on 0116 295 7011 or to find out more about sickle cell disease please visit the NHS Choices website at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

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Notes to Editors:

Symptoms of sickle cell anaemia vary from person to person. Common symptoms include:

- Episodes of pain when blood cells get stuck in the blood vessels. The pain can be in the bones, joints, stomach and chest
- Swollen hands and feet are often the first sign of sickle cell anaemia in babies
- Chronic anaemia (low iron levels in the blood, which makes you, feel tired and out of breath). However, people with sickle cell anaemia should **not** take extra iron because their bodies can't cope with it
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes because the liver can't get rid of dead sickle cells)

People with sickle cell anaemia can be more vulnerable to infections, such as pneumonia. Therefore they may be offered a daily dose of penicillin to protect against this. The Sickle Cell Society offers help and support for those patients newly diagnosed and living with sickle cell disease. They can be contacted on 020 8961 7795 and will be able to refer you to a support centre in your area.

This press release was issued by Liz Thomas at NHS Leicester City. For more information, contact the communications office on 0116 295 4123.

NHS Leicester City is the operating name for Leicester City Primary Care Trust.