

Sickle Cell Trait

You have been told your baby has sickle cell trait. What does this mean?

People with sickle cell trait do not have sickle cell disease. Sickle cell trait is inherited from parents - just like eye and hair color. Your baby received one normal blood gene protein, hemoglobin A, from one parent and the sickle cell blood gene protein, hemoglobin S, from the other parent.

Sickle cell trait usually does not cause any problems. It will not change to sickle cell disease later on in life. Usually, the trait will not affect your baby's health. However, you should always let any health care providers know your child tested positive for sickle cell trait.

Your baby's doctor may want another blood test to confirm the initial test results. It is possible (1 in 4 chance) for someone with the trait and their partner who also has the trait, to have a baby with sickle cell disease. Testing is done mainly to see if your child could pass the sickle cell trait to their own children.

Lots of people of color have sickle cell trait. It is common in people of African, Mediterranean, Middle Eastern and Indian origins. It is not only blacks who have sickle cell conditions.

Hemoglobin is a special protein found in the red blood cells of all people that gives blood its red color and carries oxygen throughout the body. More than 500 different types or variants of hemoglobin are known. Babies in Kentucky are tested right after birth for sickle cell disease. Sickle cell disease (not trait) can be very painful and cause other problems.

For more information, contact the Pediatric Hematology Clinics at the University of Louisville or University of Kentucky.