## Job Corps Chronic Care Management Plan



# SICKLE CELL ANEMIA: A FACT SHEET FOR STUDENTS

What is sickle cell anemia?

Sickle cell anemia is a genetic disorder of red blood cells. One can have no symptoms with mild red blood cell disorders or crippling symptoms with severe disorders.

The disorder occurs when normal red blood cells distort due to structural weakness causing the blood cell to look like a sickle instead of its typical round shape. This interferes with normal blood flow, blocking smaller vessels and depriving cells of oxygen and nutrients. This results in severe pain in parts of the body where blood is blocked, especially fingers/toes, bones, and organs.

If both parents pass on the sickle gene, their child may have the most severe anemia (known as hemoglobin SS disorder). If only one parent passes the sickle gene, their child may have sickle cell trait (known as hemoglobin SA).

What are the symptoms of sickle cell anemia?

Pain in joints, fingers, toes, ribs, and other bones is the most common symptom. The pain may be mild or severe enough to prevent one from getting up and walking. Sickle cell can cause fatigue, shortness of breath, headache and dehydration.

Sickle cell anemia is most often identified by a screening test done at birth. If your parents say your test indicated a sickle cell problem, you should always tell your doctor, nurse, coach, and athletic trainer. If testing is not done, a person may go for years with mild to moderate unexplained symptoms or no symptoms and not know they have sickle cell. Unrecognized sickle cell can create adverse effects that are silent and serious.

What are the treatments for sickle cell anemia?

Treatment varies depending on the variant and severity of the disorder. Severity of symptoms will vary at different times of a person’s life and vary greatly from person to person even among those in the same family.

1. If you have symptoms of sickle cell anemia such as unexplained pain, ask about family history of sickle cell anemia and seek medical care.
2. If you know you have sickle cell anemia, let health and wellness center staff know and you will be placed on an individual management plan to reduce your symptoms and prevent problems with the disorder.

**What are some prevention methods?**

1. Lifestyle management is essential for the best outcomes. This includes minimal stress, a good night’s sleep, and routine hydration, diet, and exercise, all on a daily basis.
2. When life stress occurs, speaking with the nurse, counselor, TEAP Specialist, or Center Mental Health Consultant helps reduce life stress and the risk of a crisis.
3. Sudden changes in life routines should be avoided when possible. For instance, participation in weekend sporting events or fasting or excess eating or loss of sleep are noted to trigger symptoms.
4. High altitude, including airplane flights, and certain foods, herbs, and medicines can also trigger symptoms. Check with your medical team regarding the risk of these triggers.

