A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

A Century of Sickle Cell

Sickle Cell Awareness Month — September, 2010
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[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC — safer, healthier people.

[Susan Laird] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC,* a weekly feature of the *MMWR*, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm Susan Laird, filling in for your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

Nearly 100 years ago, the first case of what became known as sickle cell disease was documented. It's an inherited blood disorder that affects more than 100,000 persons in the United States. The disease is more prevalent in blacks, Hispanics, and some Asian Americans.

Melissa Creary is a researcher with CDC's National Center for Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities. She's joining us today to discuss sickle cell disease. Welcome to the show, Melissa.

[Melissa Creary] Thanks for having me.

[Susan Laird] Melissa, who does sickle cell disease commonly affect?

[Melissa Creary] Well, sickle cell disease is particularly common among people whose ancestors come from sub-Saharan Africa, India, Saudi Arabia, and Mediterranean countries. And because of migration of individuals whose ancestors come from these regions, sickle cell disease affects significant numbers of individuals in other parts of the world, including the Americas, as well.

[Susan Laird] So, how is sickle cell disease first detected?

[Melissa Creary] If you were born in the United States, chances are that you were screened for the disease. As of 2006, all 50 states have implemented a newborn screening program. If you are uncertain about your status, your healthcare provider can help determine it with a simple blood test.

[Susan Laird] So what are the symptoms of sickle cell disease?

[Melissa Creary] Well there are several complications of sickle cell disease. They include infection, anemia, having events of extreme pain, stroke, asthma is common, as well as general organ damage.

[Susan Laird] Is sickle cell a life-threatening disease?

[Melissa Creary] Since sickle cell disease is a blood disorder, it can potentially damage any organ in the body. And it has complications that can have serious outcomes and even death.

However, people who have the disease are living longer due to early interventions and advances in treatment.

[Susan Laird] So, can sickle cell be treated?

[Melissa Creary] Well, outside of a bone marrow transplant, there is no cure. However, there are ways to treat complications. You and your healthcare provider should develop a care plan together and include ways to stay hydrated, get proper rest, and maybe supplement with folic acid.

[Susan Laird] Where can our listeners get more information about sickle cell disease?

[Melissa Creary] Go to www.cdc.gov and do a search for sickle cell disease.

[Susan Laird] Thanks Melissa. I've been talking today with CDC's Melissa Creary about sickle cell disease.

Usually diagnosed during the newborn period, sickle cell can lead to complications, such as infection, stroke, and extreme pain. There are treatments available that can decrease the number and severity of painful episodes, as well as reduce the risk of complications that can result from the disease.

Until next time, be well. This is Susan Laird for *A Cup of Health with CDC.*

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.