

Sickle Cell testing now available free to Oakland adults

BY JENNIFER PLACINTO
STAFF WRITER

It can cut a person's lifespan in half — and the Sickle Cell Disease Association of America is trying to halt the hereditary illness in its tracks through counseling and other services.

Statistics show one of every 12 individuals are carriers of Sickle Cell Trait while one in 800 have Sickle Cell Anemia. Both conditions are inherited from biological parents.

While there is no cure for the disease, it can be prevented through testing and education.

"It's important to get tested right away," said Judith Moore, a social worker with the association, adding that recurrence of both conditions through the generations can be diminished if persons exhibiting Sickle Cell Trait receive counseling.

Sickle Cell Anemia induces clogging in the blood vessels, restricting the flow of blood throughout the body causing pain and swelling and eventually leading to an early death, Moore said. Some of the symptoms of Sickle Cell Anemia include gallstones, delay in growth and anemia.

The disease primarily affects African American males and females and a smaller sector of Caucasians, Arabs and Muslims.

If both partners exhibit the Sickle Cell Trait, their child has a 25 percent chance of being born with Sickle Cell Anemia. If one partner has Sickle Cell Trait, there is a 50/50 chance the newborn will carry the trait.

Sickle Cell Trait is not harmful under normal conditions, Moore said. But in elevations exceeding 8,000 feet, they can experience the effects, which will subside once they return to normal elevations. Moore added that flying in commercial airlines does not affect persons with Sickle Cell Trait.

"It becomes a problem only when they meet their other half," Moore said.

Anyone born after July 1, 1987 has already received a test administered during newborn screening. If you were born before that date, a test is recommended. Parents who are uncertain if their children have been tested should contact their

Children who have not been tested should be taken to their family physician. Adults can receive free testing at Sickle Cell Disease Association in Pontiac.

physicians or the Sickle Cell Disease Association in Detroit at (313) 884-4408.

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If an individual tests positive, they will be assessed for free support and referral needs. Youth counseling helps children deal with the disease through activities and outings. Adult and parent services are also available.

"It's... hard for the parents to deal with the fact that their children have the disease," Moore said. "It's very stressful."

Persons diagnosed with Sickle Cell Trait usually receive a single counseling session. "We let them know how they got it and what it is," Moore said, adding that typically there are no more services until they decide to have children.

Moore stressed that individuals can't receive counseling services or any other assistance unless they have medical documentation of the illness or are tested at the site. Other health and financial services are available and the association works with other low income and social service agencies.

Testing for adults at the Pontiac Sickle Cell Center, 132 Franklin Blvd. in Pontiac, will be available by appointment only from noon to 4 p.m. in Room 204 May 27.

Volunteers are needed for clerical work and to work with the children. Donations are always needed, Moore said. Checks can be made payable to Sickle Cell Pontiac Office, 132 Franklin Blvd., Room 204, Pontiac, Michigan 48341.

For more information, call Sickle Cell Disease Association in Pontiac at (248) 868-7222.

Legislators meet with OU officials

Oakland University alumni, supporters, students and staff were expected to meet Michigan state legislators and decision-makers May 21 during Oakland University Day at the Capitol.

Experts from the Presidents Council, state universities of Michigan, Senate and House fiscal agencies and the state's management and budget department will talk about legislative policies.

Visitors will have the opportunity to meet with legislators and staffs about new university programs and shared higher education issues. A lunch reception is also planned.

"Oakland University is committed to providing a dynamic, student-focused learning environment," said Rochelle Black, director of OU office of government relations. "This trip is one way we can foster ideas on how to enrich educational delivery in an expanding region that demands an adaptable work force of lifelong learners."

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