



## INDIANA HEMOPHILIA & THROMBOSIS CENTER, INC.

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*Indiana's only federally recognized comprehensive hemophilia center*

### **Sickle Cell Disease and Travel**

Sickle cell disease is an inherited blood disorder in which the red blood cells assume a sickle shape because of an abnormal hemoglobin. The abnormally shaped red blood cells cause obstructed blood flow in vessels leading to episodes of pain. The episodes of pain are called crises and can affect the bones, chest, and abdomen most commonly. An obstructed blood vessel in the brain may cause a stroke with muscle weakness or if severe, even coma and death.

Certain conditions such as dehydration and cold temperatures trigger the red cells to assume a sickle cell shape. Children and adults with sickle cell disease should drink plenty of fluid daily to avoid dehydration. People with sickle cell disease should also not stand in long lines in warm temperatures due to possible dehydration; therefore, special accommodations/passes should be arranged at amusement parks. Because airplane flights may cause dehydration, it is important to drink plenty of fluids and to ambulate regularly when traveling by air. Good hydration and frequent ambulation are also important for extended travel by car.

If a person with sickle cell disease has a fever that is ignored, the risk of a bacterial infection going unchecked is high due to impaired splenic function associated with sickle cell disease. This is called sepsis and may cause critical illness or death. If a fever of 101 F or higher is noted, emergency medical care should be sought, blood cultures collected, and a broad spectrum antibiotic such as Ceftriaxone administered in a timely manner.

When traveling, it is important for the person with sickle cell disease to be aware of their baseline hemoglobin and to pack their daily medications in addition to any pain medications that may be needed.

***If you are in need of a travel letter, please ask your healthcare provider to email [ISCC@ihtc.org](mailto:ISCC@ihtc.org) for a modifiable template.***