

# Why should I be tested for sickle cell and thalassaemia?

*Knowing that you do, or do not, carry sickle cell or thalassaemia will help us to give you the pregnancy care that is right for you.*

## **Nobody in my family is affected with a sickle cell disorder or thalassaemia major. Why should I have a blood test?**

You could be a healthy carrier of sickle cell or thalassaemia.

Most children with a sickle cell disorder or thalassaemia major are born to parents who are both healthy carriers, and have no affected relatives.

## **What are sickle cell disorders and thalassaemia major?**

They are serious inherited blood disorders.

People with a sickle cell disorder can have attacks of severe pain or sudden life-threatening infections.

People with thalassaemia major need blood transfusions every month for life.

## **What is my chance of being a healthy carrier?**

Anyone can carry sickle cell or thalassaemia. Some Northern Europeans are carriers.

One in four to one in eight Africans and African-Caribbeans are carriers.

One in six to one in thirty people from the Mediterranean, Middle East, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh or the Far East are carriers.

## **How can I find out if I am a carrier?**

Your midwife, GP or practice nurse will offer you a test “for haemoglobin disorders” as part of your antenatal care. The results are completely confidential.

If the test shows you are not a carrier there is nothing to worry about. You could not have a child with a sickle cell disorder or thalassaemia major.

## **If the test shows that I am a carrier, what happens next?**

You will be contacted immediately and offered information and counselling. Your partner will be invited to have a special blood test. This is important for your pregnancy care and should be done as soon as possible.

If your partner is not a carrier there is nothing to worry about.

If you and your partner are both carriers, your child could have a sickle cell disorder or thalassaemia major.

## **What happens if my partner and I are both carriers?**

You will be sent an urgent appointment to see a specialist counsellor. The counsellor explains the risks to the baby, and what can be done about them.

A baby can be tested during pregnancy to see if it has a sickle cell disorder or thalassaemia major. This test can be done from 11 weeks of pregnancy onwards.

In any case the baby will be tested at birth, so that if there is an illness treatment can be started early.

## **To find out more...**

Ask your midwife, GP or practice nurse, or the specialist counselling service in your area: