

Our Health

You Can Help Ease The Pain Of Sickle Cell Disease

(NAPS)—At just six months of age, Tiereney Bell was diagnosed with sickle cell disease.

Understanding Sickle Cell Disease

This genetic blood disease can cause extreme pain and life-threatening complications. “It’s like having a rubber band around your wrist that’s getting tighter and tighter and never releases,” said Bell, describing the pain of a sickle cell crisis. At 17, she suffered a mini-stroke that caused slight paralysis on the left side of her body, a complication of the disease. She spent months in physical therapy to overcome the paralysis.

In the U.S. it’s estimated more than 100,000 people—the majority of African descent—live with sickle cell disease. The condition distorts soft, round blood cells and turns them hard and crescent-shaped. These cells can get caught in blood vessels which can cause extreme pain and lead to stroke and organ failure.

What Can Be Done

To help prevent complications, many people rely on monthly red blood cell exchanges, a non-surgical therapy that removes abnormal red blood cells and replaces them with healthy ones from blood donors. To date, Bell has received more than 850 units of lifesaving blood from generous donors.

To reduce the risk of transfusion complications, blood transfused to patients with sickle cell disease must be closely matched. Since people are more likely to find a compatible blood match from a donor of the same race or similar ethnicity, blood donors of all races and ethnicities are needed to help ensure a diverse blood supply to support the blood transfusion needs of patients. For Bell, blood donors who are Black can help provide a compatible match.

A two-time HBCU graduate, Bell credits regular blood transfusion treatments with helping her complete her



Tiereney Bell, sickle cell disease warrior and blood donation advocate.

studies at Xavier University and Morehouse School of Medicine, where she earned a Master of Public Health degree with a concentration in Epidemiology. Today, she works as an epidemiologist at the Environmental Protection Agency, as well as a sickle cell advocate

“Most sickle cell patients battle pain every day; most days in silence,” said Bell. “Those who understand how important blood donation are and continue to donate blood have truly earned the right to be called heroes. This selfless act is why I am still thriving.”

What About Screening

The American Red Cross is currently screening all blood, platelet and plasma donations from self-identified African American donors for the sickle cell trait. Because sickle cell trait testing at birth was not widely provided until 2006, this screening provides blood donors with additional health insight.

What You Can Do

To help save lives of people with sickle cell disease, schedule an appointment to give blood by visiting RedCrossBlood.org/OurBlood, downloading the free Red Cross Blood Donor App, calling 1-800-Red-Cross (1-800-733-2767) or enabling the Blood Donor Skill on any Alexa Echo device.