

# Why get screened for sickle cell trait?



**Before you have children, learn whether you carry the sickle cell trait, which could be passed on to your children as sickle cell disease or trait.**

## Know whether you have the sickle cell trait

Genes are passed down from parent to child. They are instructions in our cells that create eye color, blood type and other personal features. If you receive one sickle cell gene and one normal gene from your parents, you have sickle cell trait. Having sickle cell trait usually does not mean you will have health problems or symptoms because of it.

## Why it is important to get screened for the trait

If you have sickle cell trait, you should know about it because if you have children with another person who has sickle cell disease or trait, your children may be born with sickle cell disease or trait. If you and your partner both have sickle cell trait, there is a 1 in 4 chance that each child you have together will be born with sickle cell disease. Sickle cell disease is a severe, life-threatening, and painful genetic disease that can shorten your child's life.

## These groups should get screened

In the United States, the sickle cell trait is usually found among those whose family came from the following areas:

- Countries in Africa;
- Countries in South America, the Caribbean, and Central America, including Mexico;
- Saudi Arabia;
- India; or
- Turkey, Greece, Italy or other Mediterranean countries.

For more information, visit the [Sickle Cell Data Collection in California website](#)

**People of all ancestries, races, and ethnicities can have sickle cell trait or disease. Couples should discuss this with each other and a doctor when making family planning decisions.**



## Athletics and sickle cell trait

Some athletics programs screen athletes for sickle cell trait because they fear athletes with the trait might collapse under extreme conditions if they don't have adequate water or rest. Instead of screening, a better approach that does not discriminate is for coaches to take measures to prevent all athletes from playing sports under extreme conditions without adequate water or rest, not just those with sickle cell trait.

## Have you already been screened?

If you were born in California after February 1990 or elsewhere in the U.S. after 1984, you should already have newborn screening information, including sickle cell status, as part of your medical record. Contact your doctor, the hospital where you were born, or the [CA Newborn Screening Program](http://bit.ly/2rffWRg) (<http://bit.ly/2rffWRg>). Newborn Screening provides confidential results for those who request them, not just for NCAA athletes. See a [listing of all state newborn screening programs](http://bit.ly/2spyzGK) (<http://bit.ly/2spyzGK>) maintained by the NewSTEPS program.

## How to get screened

If you were born before 1990 in California or before 1984 in another state or outside of the United States, you can get a simple blood test or tests that screen for sickle cell trait.

## Where to get screened

- Ask your doctor to authorize a blood test to screen for sickle cell trait or disease. Ask whether there will be a cost to you for the test and how much it will be.
- If you are on Medi-Cal, the program pays for trait testing if your doctor approves it first.
- You may also [contact a clinic or community-based sickle cell organization](http://bit.ly/2tjcpIQ) (<http://bit.ly/2tjcpIQ>) in California to ask where you can get screened.

For more information, visit the [Sickle Cell Data Collection in California website](#)