

Our Health

Combating Sickle Cell Disease

(NAPS)—If you or someone you care about is among the estimated 100,000 Americans with sickle cell disease, here's information that could be important:

One Man's Story

Chris Ruffin Jr. never knows when extreme pain will strike. Since birth, Ruffin's had sickle cell disease, an inherited condition that causes extreme pain when red blood cells become hard, crescent-shaped and have difficulty carrying oxygen to the rest of the body.

"It's like having a charley horse," said Ruffin. "It's just a throbbing pain to the point where you can barely walk. It's like your whole body hurts but you can't do anything about it."

The pain can strike at any time. A sickle cell pain crisis can suddenly occur in the back, knees, legs, arms, chest or stomach and last several hours to several days.

What Can Be Done

After suffering a stroke at six years old due to complications of the disease, Ruffin began receiving monthly blood transfusions to prevent further complications. Over the course of 22 years, he has received more than 3,130 units of blood through monthly red cell exchanges.

Individuals with sickle cell disease can require frequent blood transfusions throughout their lifetime—needing as many as 100 units of blood each year—to treat complications of the disease. Unfortunately, frequent transfusions can make finding compatible blood types even more difficult if patients develop an immune response against blood from donors that is not closely matched to the blood of the recipient.

That's why on World Sickle Cell Day, June 19th, the American Red Cross wants to raise awareness about sickle cell disease and the challenges patients face while battling the chronic condition.

Through its Sickle Cell Initiative, the Red Cross has expanded its blood



Emmy Award-winning news producer Chris Ruffin requires frequent blood transfusions because of his sickle cell disease.

donation testing to include sickle cell trait screening on all donations from self-identified African American donors. This additional screening helps the Red Cross identify compatible blood types more quickly for patients with sickle cell.

Ruffin, an Emmy Award-winning senior news producer, credits a strong support system, good doctors, generous blood donors, and a consistent diet, exercise and rest routine as key factors to him succeeding with sickle cell.

"I didn't always know how important blood was," said Ruffin. "Based on the one hour it takes to donate blood, someone like me can live years longer and live a full life."

How You Can Help

Eligible individuals who are feeling well can make an appointment to donate blood by visiting RedCrossBlood.org/OurBlood, using the Red Cross Blood Donor App or calling 1-800-RED-CROSS.