



Sickle cell and acute chest syndrome (ACS)

“My daughter Pilar has sickle cell disease. Most of the time we keep things under control. But last month she got a bad cough. Since I know coughing can be a sign of acute chest syndrome, we took her to the doctor right away. I’m glad we did. It turned out that Pilar had ACS, and she was able to get treatment before she got sicker.”

Read this handout to learn signs to watch for. Find out how you can lower your child’s chance of getting acute chest syndrome (called ACS for short).

About ACS

ACS can make it hard for your child to breathe. It is a serious health problem because your child may not get the oxygen she needs. And since ACS can happen more than once, it can cause lasting lung and heart problems.

ACS can lower the amount of oxygen in the body. If a child has repeat episodes it can lead to lung disease and can weaken the heart. Learn the signs of ACS. And if you see any of the symptoms listed below, call the doctor right away.

Know the signs of ACS

Get medical help right away if your child has any of these symptoms:

- Chest pain or back pain
- Cough
- Fever
- Trouble breathing or fast breathing



Treatment for ACS

The doctor is likely to admit your child to the hospital. Your child may:

- Get antibiotics and fluids through an IV
- Get oxygen through a mask
- Do breathing exercises to help the lungs expand
- Get a blood transfusion, if necessary. To learn more about transfusions, ask the SCDA for the fact sheet called Red Blood Cell Transfusions.

Your child's doctor may also suggest special medicines to treat ACS:

- Drugs that prevent or treat infection (antibiotics). These may be taken through an IV or by mouth.
- Drugs that ease pain
- Drugs that help open up the lung passages

Take 5 steps to help lower your child's chance of getting ACS

- 1 Keep pain under control. Being in pain can lower the body's ability to breathe well.
- 2 Give your child medicine the way the doctor prescribes.
- 3 Get your child's flu and pneumonia vaccines on time.
- 4 Don't smoke near your child, and don't allow others to smoke near your child.
- 5 Help your child do breathing exercises to help expand the lungs, especially when the child has a pain attack and is lying in bed. The doctor may ask your child to use a special machine called an "incentive spirometer."

The more you know, the better you can lower your child's chance of getting ACS.

How can I learn more about ACS?

- Talk to your child's doctor.
- Contact the SCDA (Sickle Cell Disease Association of America) at 800-421-8453. Or, go to our website: www.sicklecelldisease.org

