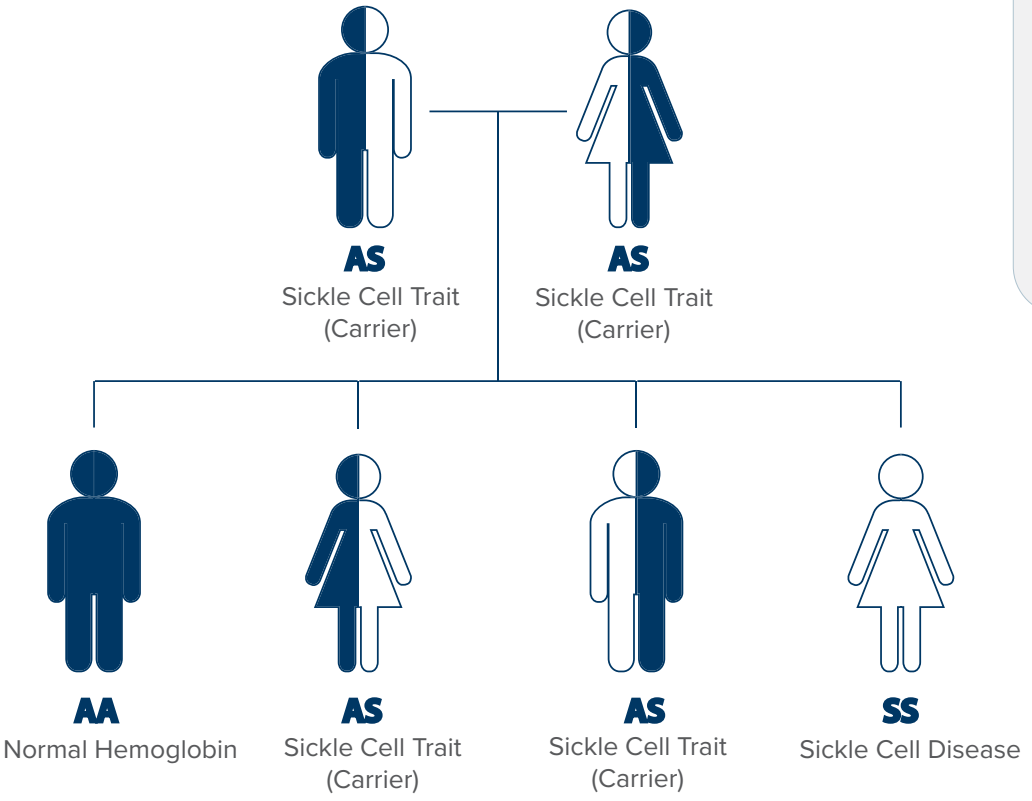
Testing for Sickle Cell Anemia

WHAT IS SICKLE CELL ANEMIA?

Sickle cell anemia is a disease passed down through families.

The red blood cell that carries oxygen to the body is normally shaped like a disc. The red blood cells of a person with sickle cell disease are misshapen and instead are crescent-shaped (like a sickle). The abnormal shape of the cells cause them to get stuck in small blood vessels, become fragile and break, and deliver less oxygen to the body.

Sickle cell anemia is inherited from both parents. A person who has inherited this gene from only one parent has the sickle cell trait but does not have the symptoms of sickle cell anemia. The disease occurs in about 1 out of every 500 African American births and about 1 of every 36,000 Hispanic American births. The sickle cell trait occurs in about 1 in 12 African Americans.



HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE THE SICKLE CELL TRAIT?

Your health care provider may order a simple blood test called hemoglobin electrophoresis. A blood sample is taken and the oxygen-carrying protein (hemoglobin) is measured and evaluated for any abnormalities.

If it is found that you do have the sickle cell trait, your health care provider may suggest testing the father of your baby as well to help determine the risk of your baby developing the disease. If both parents are positive for the sickle cell trait, this results in your baby having a 1 in 4 chance of having sickle cell anemia.

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