SEPTEMBER

NATIONAL SICKLE CELL DISEASE AWARENESS MONTH

September is National Sickle Cell Disease Awareness Month. In Illinois, every year, about 100 infants are diagnosed with a form of sickle cell disease, and about one of every 375 African-American children is affected by sickle cell disease, making it one of the most prevalent genetic disease in the U.S.

Sickle cell disease changes normal, round red blood cells into cells that are shaped like crescent moons or a sickle, which is a farm tool with a curved blade. Normal red blood cells move easily through your blood vessels, taking oxygen to every part of your body. But sickled cells can get stuck and block blood vessels, which stops the oxygen from getting through. That causes a lot of pain and can harm organs, muscle, and bones.

Sickle cell disease is inherited, which means it is passed from parent to child. To get sickle cell disease, a child has to inherit two sickle cell genes-one from each parent. When a child inherits the gene from just one parent, that child has sickle cell trait. Having the trait means that you do not have the disease but you are a carrier and could pass the gene on to your children.

Painful events are the most common symptom of sickle cell disease. They often have anemia, caused by a shortage of red blood cells. Anemia makes you feel weak and tired.

A simple blood test can show whether a person has sickle cell disease. Most states test for sickle cell disease before infants go home from the hospital.

Having sickle cell disease means a lifelong battle against the health problems it can cause, such as pain, infections, anemia, and stroke. But many people are able to have a very good quality of life by learning to manage the disease.