



## MARAC Advisory Statement: COVID-19 Update

August 26, 2021 — The Sickle Cell Disease Association of America Medical and Research Advisory Committee reminds the sickle cell community that the COVID-19 pandemic is not over and that news is moving quickly in many areas.

### MARAC recommendations are making a minor shift to emphasize a more individualized approach

- Continue to recommend vaccination against COVID. For booster dose of vaccine, currently SCD is not eligible but expect changes in CDC guidance.
- Continue to recommend general precautions: wearing masks, keeping physical distancing, good ventilation, and washing hands. These are public health measures.
- Recommend neutralizing monoclonal antibodies (mAb) - (Regeneron) as early treatment for mild symptomatic COVID in individuals with SCD [ $<10d$  after the test, age 12y+, wt 88 lb+ (40kg+), not hospitalized, not newly on oxygen]. Encourage getting tested if you have COVID symptoms. Possible prophylactic treatment with Regeneron antibodies if exposed to COVID.
- No general recommendation for all individuals with SCD to stay home nor all to return to in-person activities. Help patients and families make individualized assessments of risk and trade-offs of returning to work or school in-person. Factors to consider were listed in MARAC July 2020 “checklist for return to school” (plus vaccination status): the community’s rates of COVID and variants, vaccination status, family socioeconomic situation, ventilation and other protective measures in the building, mental health needs, educational needs.

### Updates on news:

- 1. Third dose of vaccine** – recommendations are not yet clear for the immunocompromise of SCD. We await more updates (8/30/2021).
- 2. Please remember that you can take precautions to stop COVID-19. The coronavirus spreads quickly in the tiny droplets breathed out by an infected person. The person might not know that they have coronavirus infection.**
  - a. Please be aware of local conditions that change the risk of meeting an infected person. Keep track of the rate of new cases of COVID-19, the rate of vaccination against COVID-19, and whether new variants of the coronavirus are appearing near you.
  - b. Where vaccination rates are low, the coronavirus spreads quickly. Please continue to take precautions so that you can avoid COVID-19 infection: wear masks, maintain physical distance, avoid people who are coughing or otherwise contagious, avoid indoor spaces and crowds.
  - c. Wearing a mask is not officially required in some situations, but MARAC advises that individuals with SCD should still wear masks in many situations. If you must be in a crowded indoor space, wear a mask. If you are surrounded by strangers or friends who might have been exposed to sick people, then it is wiser to wear a mask. Take off the mask when you and all those around you have been vaccinated, and you are certain that nobody around you is sick.

### **3. MARAC continues to advise individuals with sickle cell disease to get vaccination against coronavirus.**

- a. Any of the three types of vaccine available in the U.S.A. are safe for individuals with SCD.
- b. Vaccinations against coronavirus have now been shown to be safe for millions of people, with a known pattern of temporary aches that go away in about 2 days. It is rare for people to get unusual side effects after vaccination against coronavirus.
- c. The vaccines against coronavirus protect very well against serious COVID infection, hospitalization and death. Break-through-infection after vaccination have been mild cases, not severe.
- d. People who are not vaccinated are being barred from some travel and entertainment. People who are not vaccinated are barred from visiting senior citizen centers.

**Did you notice who was getting hospitalized for COVID in the summer 2021? Almost all were people who were not vaccinated.**

### **4. How much more risk is there for COVID in SCD?**

Risk of death from COVID is an estimated 1.5 to 2 times the general population based on Brandow & Panepinto SECURESCD database, U.S. single-institution reports, UK and French databases. The risk is not as high as MARAC feared at the beginning of the pandemic.

- a. Risk of complications for COVID in SCD is probably higher than in the general population. Hospitalizations with COVID are higher because pain or fever from COVID could lead to hospitalization in SCD when otherwise might have been sent home.
- b. Death & moderate/severe complications are at younger ages in SCD and with organ damage risk factors like kidney damage in SCD, compared to general population.
- c. There are likely excess deaths during the pandemic because of deferred care for other problems (e.g., poor care in pregnancy, delayed diagnosis of cancer).
- d. Individuals with SCD and kidney or lung problems are more likely to have severe COVID.
- e. People with SCD-SC and SCD-Sbeta+thalassemia can have moderate or severe COVID cases.
- f. Over half of the reports of COVID in SCD were associated with intense vaso-occlusive pain or Sickle Acute chest syndrome.
- g. COVID in SCD can have mild cases.
- h. COVID remains dangerous for everyone, especially minority groups.

## SCDA Medical and Research Advisory Committee Members

### **Miguel R. Abboud, MD**

Professor of Pediatrics and Pediatric Hematology-  
Oncology  
Chairman  
Department of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine  
American University of Beirut, Lebanon

### **Biree Andemariam, MD**

Vice Chair, Sickle Cell Disease Association  
of America  
Director, New England Sickle Cell Institute  
Associate Professor of Medicine  
University of Connecticut Health  
Farmington, Connecticut

### **Shawn Bediako, PhD**

Professor  
Department of Psychology  
University of Maryland Baltimore County  
Baltimore, Maryland

### **Andrew Campbell, MD**

Center for Cancer and Blood Disorders  
Children's National Health System  
Associate Professor of Pediatrics  
George Washington University School of Medicine and  
Health Sciences  
Washington, DC

### **Raffaella Colombatti, MD, PhD**

Physician Azienda Ospedaliera-Università di Padova  
Department of Womens' and Child Health  
Clinic of Pediatric Hematology Oncology  
Via Giustiniani 3 35129  
Padova Italy

### **Lori Crosby, PsyD**

Co-Director, Innovations in Community Research,  
Division of Behavioral Medicine & Clinical Psychology  
Co-Director, CCTST, Community Engagement Core  
Psychologist, Research, Behavioral Medicine & Clinical  
Psychologist  
Cincinnati Children's  
Professor, UC Department of Pediatrics  
Cincinnati, Ohio

### **Deepika Darbari, MD**

Center for Cancer and Blood Disorders  
Children's National Health System  
Professor of Pediatrics  
George Washington University School of Medicine and  
Health Sciences  
Washington, DC

### **Payal Desai, MD**

Associate Professor  
Director of Sickle Cell Research  
The Ohio State University  
JamesCare at Ohio State East Hospital  
Columbus, Ohio

### **Edward Donnell Ivy, MD, MPH**

Vice Chief Medical Officer, Sickle Cell Disease Association  
of America  
Director of Community Outreach and Education  
The Possibilities Clinic  
Toronto, Ontario

### **James Eckman, MD**

Professor Emeritus, Hematology & Medical Oncology  
Emory University School of Medicine  
Department of Hematology and Medical Oncology  
Atlanta, Georgia

### **Mark Gladwin, MD**

Professor and Chair  
Department of Medicine  
Founder, Pittsburgh Heart, Lung, and Blood Vascular  
Medicine Institute  
University of Pittsburgh  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

### **Jo Howard, MB Bchir, MRCP, FRCPath**

Head of Red Cell/Sickle Cell Service  
Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust  
London, United Kingdom

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**Lewis Hsu, MD, PhD**

Co-Chair, Medical and Research Advisory Committee,  
Sickle Cell Disease Association of America  
Chief Medical Officer, Sickle Cell Disease Association  
of America  
Director of Pediatric Sickle Cell  
Professor of Pediatric Hematology-Oncology  
University of Illinois at Chicago  
Chicago, Illinois

**Baba Inusa**

Professor of Paediatric Haematology  
Lead Consultant Paediatric Sickle Cell and Thalassaemia  
Evelina London Children's Hospital  
Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust  
Women and Children's Academic Health  
Faculty of Life Sciences and Medicine  
King's College  
London, United Kingdom

**Elizabeth Klings, MD**

Associate Professor of Medicine  
Director, Center for Excellence in Sickle Cell  
Disease  
Director, Pulmonary Hypertension Center  
Boston University School of Medicine  
Boston, Massachusetts

**Lakshmanan Krishnamurti, MD**

Professor of Pediatrics  
Director of Bone Marrow Transplant  
Joseph Kuechenmeister Aflac Field Force Chair  
Aflac Cancer and Blood Disorders Center  
Children's Healthcare of Atlanta/Emory University  
Atlanta, Georgia

**Sophie Lanzkron, MD**

Director, Sickle Cell Center for Adults  
The Johns Hopkins Hospital  
Baltimore, Maryland

**Julie Makani, FRCP, PhD**

Associate Professor  
Department of Haematology and Blood Transfusion  
Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences  
Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

**Caterina P. Minniti, MD**

Director, Sickle Cell Center Montefiore Health System  
Professor, Departments of Medicine and Pediatrics  
Albert Einstein College of Medicine  
Bronx, New York

**Genice T. Nelson, DNP, APRN, ANP-BC**

Program Director, New England Sickle Cell Institute &  
Connecticut Bleeding Disorders Programs,  
UConn Health, Farmington, Connecticut  
Board Member, Sickle Cell Disease Association of America

**Isaac Odame, MB ChB, MRCP(UK), FRCPATH, FRCPCH, FRCPC**

Professor, Department of Paediatrics  
University of Toronto  
The Hospital for Sick Children Division of Haematology/  
Oncology  
Toronto, Ontario

**Kwaku Ohene-Frempong, MD**

Director Emeritus, Comprehensive Sickle Cell Center  
Emeritus Professor of Pediatrics, University of  
Pennsylvania  
President, Sickle Cell Foundation of Ghana  
Emeritus Board Member, Sickle Cell Disease Association  
of America

**Gwendolyn Poles, DO**

Former Medical Director, Kline Health Center  
Faculty, Internal Medicine Program  
UPMC Pinnacle  
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania  
Board Member, Sickle Cell Disease Association of America

**John D. Roberts, MD**

Yale Adult Sickle Cell Program  
Smilow Cancer Hospital at Yale New Haven  
New Haven, Connecticut

**Wally Smith, MD**

Professor  
Scientific Director, VCU Center on Health  
Disparities  
Director, VCU Adult Sickle Cell Program  
Department of Internal Medicine Division of General  
Internal Medicine  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
Richmond, Virginia

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**Crawford J. Strunk MD**

Director, Sickle Cell Disease and Hemoglobinopathy Clinic  
Pediatric Hematology/Oncology Program  
ProMedica Ebeid Children's Hospital  
Toledo, Ohio

**Immacolata Tartaglione, MD PhD**

Department of Woman, Child and General and Specialist  
Surgery  
Università degli Studi della Campania "Luigi Vanvitelli"  
Naples, Italy

**Marsha Treadwell, PhD**

Director, Sickle Cell Care Coordination Initiative  
Regional Director, Pacific Sickle Cell Regional  
Collaborative  
Professor of Psychiatry and Pediatrics  
University of California San Francisco Benioff Children's  
Hospital Oakland  
Oakland, California

**Winfred C. Wang, MD**

Emeritus, St. Jude Faculty  
Member, Department of Hematology  
St. Jude Children's Research Hospital  
Memphis, Tennessee

**Russell E. Ware, MD, PhD**

Director, Division of Hematology  
Co-Director, Cancer and Blood Diseases Institute  
Director, Global Health Center  
Marjory J. Johnson Chair of Hematology Translational  
Research  
Cincinnati Children's  
Professor, UC Department of Pediatrics  
Cincinnati, Ohio

**Julie Kanter Washko, MD**

Associate Professor, Division of Hematology Oncology  
Director, Adult Sickle Cell Clinic  
University of Alabama at Birmingham  
Birmingham, Alabama

**Kim Smith-Whitley, MD**

Professor of Pediatrics  
Director, Comprehensive Sickle Cell Center  
Clinical Director, Division of Hematology  
The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
Board Member, Sickle Cell Disease Association of America

**Wanda Whitten-Shurney, MD**

CEO & Medical Director  
Sickle Cell Disease Association, Michigan Chapter Inc.  
Detroit, Michigan  
Board Member, Sickle Cell Disease Association of America

**Ahmar U. Zaidi, MD**

Assistant Professor of Pediatrics  
Comprehensive Sickle Cell Center, Children's Hospital  
of Michigan  
Director of Physician Network Development, University  
Pediatricians  
Wayne State University/Central Michigan University School  
of Medicine  
Detroit, Michigan