

The Power of a Blood Donation

Isaiah Darden-Roey - Blood Recipient

Shortly after Isaiah Darden-Roey was born, he was diagnosed with sickle cell disease. Sickle cell disease is an inherited blood disorder that causes anemia, lung tissue and organ damage, strokes and terrible pain. People with sickle cell disease have red blood cells that are stiff, distorted in shape and sometimes block small blood vessels.

His first symptoms appeared when he was six months old – his red blood cell count would drop very low, causing painful episodes that included swollen hands and feet – and his treatment included IV fluids, blood transfusions and pain medication.

At the age of three, Isaiah had a stroke, which is fairly common in sickle cell patients. To reduce the risk of a second stroke, he was placed on a blood transfusion program that requires him to get transfusions every three weeks.

The transfusion process usually takes place over two days, or one long day, in the Pediatric Special Procedures Clinic at the American Family Children's Hospital in Madison, Wis. On the first day, Isaiah and his mother, Latyna, go in to have his blood typed to match with donor blood. On the second day, he receives his transfusion, which takes two to three hours, with an hour of observation afterward. Each time, Isaiah has his vitals checked before, during and after the transfusion to make sure he's not having an allergic reaction to the blood he receives.

It's important that blood donors reflect the ethnic diversity of the patients who receive their blood. Patients with sickle cell disease – primarily in the African-American community – are less likely to have complications from blood donated by African Americans.

"Isaiah has type O positive blood, but usually receives O negative blood because there isn't any O positive blood available that is a good match for Isaiah," says Latyna. "His body is starting to build up antibodies, making it harder to find a good match for his transfusions."



Photo credit: Jessie Morris Photography

Since the age of 3, Isaiah has received over 100 planned blood transfusions as part of his treatment for sickle cell disease.

Asthma, pneumonia and painful episodes require Isaiah and his mom to make trips to the American Family Children's Hospital on almost a monthly basis, sometimes more.

"The staff at the Children's Hospital has been wonderful and caring to both Isaiah and the needs of our family," says Latyna. "It's hard being a parent of a child with a chronic condition, but they really make it feel okay and show understanding even when times are rough."

Hospital teachers help keep Isaiah on top of his school work, and the child life specialists and volunteers keep him entertained. As a fun-loving eight-year-old, Isaiah enjoys playing outside with his sister and cousins and is building a collection of Transformers toys. Although he misses a lot of school, when he can go, he's always excited to be there.



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