

## **Breanna York**

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*"Sickle cell disease affects the whole family."*

Mattie York, single mother of four, knows the impact of this mostly African-American disease.

Her daughter Breanna was diagnosed through the routine test now given to African-American newborns.

Mattie knew she herself carried the sickle cell trait and first thought the medical staff simply meant that Breanna also carried it. She was shocked to be informed that Breanna had the actual disease. "I really didn't know what sickle cell was," Mattie admitted. Breanna was already having pain attacks – quite common for sickle cell patients – but Mattie assumed the baby was just fussy.

Mattie explains, "People don't understand the disease. A sickle cell patient can be fine one minute and exhausted the next. They are much more susceptible to infections." Older daughter Erica and Breanna got H1N1 influenza last fall. Erica felt miserable, but Breanna was hospitalized for two weeks.

Erica, a college student and sister Mattronique both donate blood at the South Texas Blood & Tissue Center. They encourage their friends to join them. Erica states, "Not enough African-Americans donate blood. We don't realize the importance this has in the lives of many people. We need to do more."

Breanna was an honor student at Woods Middle School, in spite of being frequently absent due to her illness. Now enrolled in Madison High School, she is looking forward to her schooling there.

The family is glad to participate in South Texas Blood & Tissue Center's Life Link program. By being Life Links, they can help explain to others what sickle cell is and explain the importance of blood donation.

"Many sickle cell patients depend on blood transfusion more than Breanna does. Donating can help so many people," Mattie says.

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*Breanna and her family help educate others about sickle cell disease.*



*The York family donates blood to help others in need.*