






RH Negative Blood in Pregnancy



RH factor

Have you been told that your blood type is Rh negative? The difference between being positive and being negative is a single protein called Rhesus (Rh) factor. If you have the protein sitting on the surface of your red blood cells, you are RH positive. If you don't, you are RH negative.

RH Incompatibility

-  If you are Rh negative and your baby is Rh positive, you have Rh incompatibility. As soon as your body comes into contact with the Rh protein -- a substance it has never seen before -- it begins making antibodies against it. For this reason, it may later mistake a baby that is Rh positive for an unwelcome invader and develop an immune reaction that actually attacks the baby!
-  Rh incompatibility isn't usually a problem during your first pregnancy because blood from a developing fetus doesn't mingle with your own until the time of delivery.
-  The immune system of an Rh negative mom has to be exposed to Rh positive blood one or more times before it can develop a response that is strong enough to harm the baby. During labor and delivery, there is a likelihood that you will be exposed to some of your child's blood.
-  These antibodies are generally harmless until you have another pregnancy. If your first pregnancy ended in miscarriage or abortion, or if you have an invasive procedure done, such as an amniocentesis, your doctor will recommend preventive treatment .
-  If you become pregnant with a second Rh-positive baby, your antibodies will set out to do their job. Antibodies can cross over into the baby's bloodstream and wipe out any cells they identify as foreign. This may cause your baby's red blood cells to swell and rupture, leading to jaundice, anemia and in extreme cases can lead to brain damage, heart failure, or even death. Fortunately, modern medicine has dramatically reduced these risks.

How to Protect your Baby

If you are Rh negative and you are carrying an Rh positive baby, your doctor can lower the risk of future trouble by giving you a shot of a blood product called Rhogam within 72 hours of delivery. This injection will clear any Rh proteins that reach your body before your immune system has a chance to mount an attack.

As an extra precaution, your doctor will recommend an Rhogam injection around the 28th week of pregnancy. The only known side effects are soreness at the injection site or a slight fever. **There is no risk of HIV transmission through this purified blood product.**

If you are Rh negative and you experience a miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy, bleeding during pregnancy, or have an abortion, you should also receive Rhogam. This treatment is also recommended after some prenatal tests, including amniocentesis. Repeat injections are necessary with all future pregnancies, as the medication appears to offer protection for only about three months.

Your healthcare provider will most likely recommend a blood test for the father of your baby. An Rh negative woman does not need treatment with Rhogam if blood tests show that the baby's father is also RH negative. Two Rh negative parents always make an Rh negative baby, eliminating the concern for Rh disease..



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