



Rh-Negative Blood Type in Pregnancy

What is blood type?

Your blood type tells you the type of red blood cells that are in your body. The red blood cells in your blood can be type A, B, AB, or O. Your red blood cells are also Rh positive or Rh negative. Rh is a special protein on the red blood cells. People who have this protein are Rh positive. People who do not have the protein are Rh negative. A blood test done at your first prenatal visit will tell you your blood type and if you are Rh positive or Rh negative.

I am Rh negative. What does this mean for my pregnancy?

During pregnancy and birth, you can get a very small amount of your baby's blood into your blood. If this happens and your baby is Rh positive, your body sees the baby's Rh-positive red blood cells as different from yours. Your body then may make antibodies that kill Rh-positive red blood cells. Rh-positive antibodies won't hurt you or your first Rh-positive baby. If you get pregnant again and the next baby is Rh positive, the antibodies that are already in your body from the first pregnancy can cross the placenta and hurt that baby. This is called Rh sensitization. It can cause fetal anemia (low iron in the blood), miscarriage, stillbirth, or a serious illness in the baby. Fortunately, Rh sensitization is very rare because women who are Rh negative get a RhoGAM shot (injection).

What is RhoGAM?

RhoGAM is a medicine that stops your blood from making antibodies that kill Rh-positive blood cells. RhoGAM has a very small amount of Rh-positive protein that stops your body from making permanent antibodies against Rh-positive blood. RhoGAM does not hurt you or your baby.

When do I get RhoGAM?

The chance of your blood and your baby's blood mixing is highest during the birth of your baby. It can also happen during the last 3 months of your pregnancy, but this is rare. RhoGAM is given around 28 weeks of pregnancy to protect you for the rest of your pregnancy and during the birth. RhoGAM works for about 13 weeks.

How do I know if my baby is Rh positive?

Soon after you give birth, your baby's blood will be tested for the blood type and Rh type. If your baby has Rh-positive blood, you will get another shot of RhoGAM within 72 hours after you give birth. If your baby's blood is Rh negative, you will not need the second RhoGAM shot.

Are there any other times that I might need RhoGAM?

RhoGAM is also given anytime that your blood could come into contact with Rh-positive blood cells, such as:

- Any vaginal bleeding during pregnancy
- Miscarriage, abortion, or ectopic pregnancy
- Chorionic villi sampling or amniocentesis (tests for birth defects)
- Injury to your abdomen (belly) during pregnancy, such as a car accident or fall
- External version (turning a breech baby so the baby is head first)

If you are Rh negative, you should get a RhoGAM shot within 72 hours of the possible exposure to Rh-positive blood for the shot to work best.



How safe is RhoGAM?

RhoGAM is very safe. The RhoGAM shot has been used for about 50 years and is recommended for all pregnant women who have Rh-negative blood. RhoGAM is made from human blood. RhoGAM is tested and put through many steps to make sure it is safe to use. Even though it is possible to get an infection like HIV or hepatitis from RhoGAM, this shot is made very carefully so that doesn't happen. No one in the United States has gotten any infection from RhoGAM since 1985.

There is a very rare chance that you will have an allergic reaction to the RhoGAM that causes fever or shortness of breath. But the chance of developing Rh sensitization is much higher than the risk of problems from the RhoGAM shot. Once Rh sensitization happens, all future pregnancies with an Rh-positive baby are high risk for the baby being very sick or dying. Not getting the RhoGAM shot is much more dangerous than possible problems from getting the RhoGAM shot.

Are there women who should not get RhoGAM?

You should not get RhoGAM if:

- Your blood type is Rh positive
- You have hemolytic anemia
- You have had an allergic reaction to a shot of immune globulin
- You already have Rh sensitization

Is there anything else I need to know about RhoGAM?

If you have concerns about getting a medicine made from human blood, talk to your health care provider. About 1 in 5 women who do not get RhoGAM will get Rh sensitization, which cannot be undone once it happens. If you do not get RhoGAM, you should get your blood drawn every few weeks in the last months before your baby is born to see if you have become Rh sensitized. If you do become sensitized, you can have tests to see how your baby is doing. If the baby has a serious problem, you may need to have your labor induced to give birth early.

For More Information

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists: The Rh Factor and How It Can Affect Your Pregnancy

<https://www.acog.org/Patients/FAQs/The-Rh-Factor-How-It-Can-Affect-Your-Pregnancy>

March of Dimes: Rh Disease

<http://www.marchofdimes.com/baby/rh-disease.aspx>

RhoGAM: How RhoGAM Works

<http://www.rhogam.com/patients/how-rhogam-works/>

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