

Rh Immune Globulin During Pregnancy & After Childbirth

What is the Rh factor?

The Rh factor is a small protein that is found on the red blood cells of most people. If you have the Rh factor on your red blood cells, your blood type is Rh positive. If you do not have the Rh factor on your red blood cells, your blood type is Rh negative. Being Rh negative is normal but it can cause problems during pregnancy.

I am Rh negative. What problems can this cause?

During pregnancy and childbirth, some of your baby's blood cells can enter your bloodstream. This can cause a problem if your baby's blood type is Rh positive. If any Rh positive blood cells get into your blood stream, your body will produce antibodies. This is called Rh sensitization.

Rh sensitization does not usually cause a problem with the first pregnancy. It can, however, cause serious problems for future pregnancies. Once you have antibodies, they do not go away. If you become pregnant again with another Rh positive baby, antibodies can cross into the baby's blood. The antibodies attack the baby's red blood cells. This is called "Hemolytic Disease of the Newborn". This can cause problems for your baby, such as anemia, jaundice, brain damage and - sometimes - even death.

How will I know my baby's blood type?

Before birth, chances are you will not know your baby's blood type. If both you and your baby's father have Rh negative blood, your baby will have Rh negative blood too. This situation will not cause you to develop antibodies.

If the baby's father has Rh positive blood or you do not know his blood type, there is a chance your baby's blood type is Rh positive. This situation can cause you to develop antibodies.

What can I do to prevent Rh sensitization?

An injection called Rh immune globulin will stop you from making antibodies that could harm an unborn baby. It is given by injection at about 28 weeks of pregnancy.

What is Rh immune globulin? Is it safe?

Rh immune globulin is made from human blood. It has a proven safety record. Blood donors are tested for certain viruses and the manufacturing of Rh immune globulin includes steps to remove and kill viruses.

As with all medicine made from blood, it is possible for viruses to pass from the donor to the person receiving the Rh immune globulin. The risk of this happening is extremely low.

Are there any side effects with Rh immune globulin?

You may have discomfort and slight swelling where the needle is given. You may also develop a slight fever. Allergic reactions are rare.

What happens after the baby is born?

Your baby's blood type will be tested after birth. If your baby's blood type is Rh positive, you will need more Rh immune globulin. You will receive this injection within 72 hours after birth.

Will I need Rh immune globulin with every pregnancy?

Yes. The protection from Rh immune globulin does not last. You will need it again with every pregnancy.

Are there other times I may need Rh immune globulin?

The following events during pregnancy may cause your body to make antibodies:

- Miscarriage
- Termination of pregnancy
- Amniocentesis
- Chorionic villous sampling
- Ectopic pregnancy (tubal pregnancy)
- Abdominal injury
- Placental abruption (bleeding from the placenta)

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