

Rh INCOMPATIBILITY AND Rh IMMUNE GLOBULIN

What is the Rh factor?

In addition to being a letter type (A, B, AB, or O), your blood is also considered negative or positive, depending on whether it contains a specific protein known as Rhesus (Rh). If you carry the protein, you are considered Rh positive, and if you do not, you are Rh negative.

How do I determine my blood type?

Each of our blood cells carries a specific protein, in addition to antibodies for other proteins. If you do not already know your blood type, it is easily determined through a simple blood test, which can be used to identify the type of protein present in your blood. Because your Rh status can affect your baby, a blood type test is usually done early in pregnancy.

What is Rh incompatibility?

When a woman who is Rh negative conceives a child with a man who is Rh positive, there is a 50% chance that the baby will have Rh positive blood. Rh incompatibility occurs when the baby's Rh factor is not the same as the mother's. If the baby's blood enters the mother's bloodstream during the pregnancy or delivery, the mother's system will assume it is a foreign object and try to get rid of it by creating antibodies.

During your first pregnancy, this usually is not an issue, but in later pregnancies, antibodies are already created. An Rh negative woman can also be exposed to Rh proteins through blood transfusions, miscarriage, or ectopic pregnancy.

Vaginal bleeding

If you experience vaginal bleeding at any time during your pregnancy, you must seek medical attention. During clinic hours, please contact our office. After clinic hours: less than 20 weeks', proceed to the Emergency Department; over 20 weeks', proceed to Unit 76 for further assessment. You will require RhoGam within 72 hours of any vaginal bleeding.

What are the risks to my baby?

If the mother has Rh antibodies and is carrying an Rh positive child, those antibodies can enter the baby's bloodstream and cause the blood cells to rupture, creating several complications. A decreased blood cell level may cause your baby to have anemia, jaundice, brain damage, or heart failure. In some cases, it can even cause death.

Can it be prevented?

An injection known as RhoGam is given around 28 weeks' gestation and again within 72 hours of delivery. A RhoGam injection is also required within 72 hours of any episode of bleeding during pregnancy. The injection contains Rh immune globulin, which prevents your body from making antibodies that can attack your baby's red blood cells.

Are there risks to my baby if I receive injections?

No, there have never been any documented risks or side effects to the unborn baby associated with Rh immune globulin injections.

Are there any reactions or side effects that I should know about?

Reactions to the injection rarely occur, but there can be swelling or tenderness around the injection site, fever, headache, or fatigue. If you experience any other symptoms after receiving the injection, please contact your doctor.

RhoGam products do not contain preservatives, but you should be aware that RhoGam is a blood product. It is carefully screened and sterilized, but there is a very small chance that viruses could be transmitted through injection. Ask your doctor if you would like more information about Rh incompatibility and RhoGam.

References

www.rhogam.com; www.mayoclinic.com/health/rh-factor/MY01163