

Facts About the Rh Factor

Your blood is Rh negative. Fifteen percent (15%) of the population has Rh negative blood and the rest are Rh positive. Being Rh negative is not a disease. It is just an inherited trait, the same as eye color.

When a woman is pregnant, it is important to know if she is Rh negative. When the pregnancy ends, through abortion, miscarriage or childbirth, some of the woman's blood and the blood from the fetus mix. If a woman has Rh negative blood and the fetus has Rh positive blood, some of the Rh substance will enter the woman's blood. The body treats this as a foreign substance, and the woman's blood will manufacture antibodies to fight the Rh substance.

These antibodies remain in your bloodstream for the rest of your life. The next time you become pregnant, if the pregnancy is Rh positive, the antibodies can attack and destroy the red blood cells in the bloodstream of the unborn baby causing Rh disease. The baby could be born with blood disease, jaundice, or brain damage.

Receiving an injection of Rh immune globulin (Rhogam) within 72 hours of abortion, miscarriage or childbirth prevents the formation of antibodies. The injection will prevent your body from making antibodies against the Rh positive cells.

It is important that you receive this injection after every pregnancy in order to protect future pregnancies. Even if you decide that you do not want to become pregnant in the future, you will still need to receive this injection. Receiving an injection of Rhogam will protect you against problems if you ever need an emergency blood transfusion.