

When You Need Rh Immune Globulin

Patient Information

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What is Rh immune globulin?

Rh immune globulin (RhIG) is a blood product (Canadian trade name is WinRho® and American trade name is RhoGAM®). All Rh negative women should get an injection of Rh immune globulin (WinRho®) if there is a chance of making antibodies. Antibodies are a protein the body makes when it is exposed to something that is foreign.

Rh immune globulin is given if you are Rh negative and:

- 28 weeks pregnant
- after birth if your baby is Rh positive
- have a miscarriage, abortion, amniocentesis, external cephalic version (ECV) or chorionic villous sampling (CVS) during your pregnancy
- experience physical trauma or bleeding during your pregnancy

If you already have antibodies to the Rh factor, then Rh immune globulin is not indicated but a referral to a specialist is recommended.

What does it mean to be Rh negative?

There are four different blood types (A, B, AB, and O). There is also an antigen called the Rh factor. If you have the Rh factor on your red blood cells, you are Rh positive. If you do not have the Rh factor on your red blood cells, you are Rh negative.

There is a 15 percent chance that you are Rh negative. Being Rh negative has no effect on general health, but you will need some additional care during, and right after your pregnancy.

How does being Rh negative affect pregnancy?

Rh negative women exposed to Rh positive red blood cells may make antibodies. Exposure to your baby's red cells during pregnancy is normal.

If a woman is pregnant and Rh negative and her partner is Rh positive, she is at risk for making Rh antibodies.

What can happen to my baby if I have Rh antibodies?

Rh antibodies can cross the placenta and cause your baby to get Hemolytic Disease of the Newborn (HDN). HDN can cause:

- low hemoglobin (anemia)
- toxins in the blood (jaundice)
- brain damage
- death

HealthLink BC

Dial 8-1-1

Hearing Impaired Dial 7-1-1

Talk to a Nurse 24 hours/day, 7 days/week

Pharmacist available between 5 p.m. - 9 a.m. daily

Dietitian between 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. - Monday to Friday

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Is Hemolytic Disease of the Newborn (HDN) preventable?

HDN is preventable in 99.9 percent of Rh negative women who receive injections of Rh immune globulin.

Rh immune globulin is the only way to prevent HDN caused by the Rh factor.

If you have any questions or concerns, talk to your doctor or healthcare provider.

Do I need Rh immune globulin every time I get pregnant?

Canadian medical guidelines recommend Rh immune globulin in every pregnancy to protect your baby. Once your body makes antibodies, the antibodies do not go away. The risk to your baby is more serious with every pregnancy.

What are the risks of getting Rh immune globulin?

Rh immune globulin is a blood product. The manufacturers take these steps to make it safe:

- test all blood donors for infectious diseases
- filter and treat the product to kill viruses

Canada has used WinRho[®] since 1980 with very few serious effects reported. WinRho[®] does not contain thimerosal. If you have questions, talk to your doctor or healthcare provider.

What can happen if I choose not to get Rh immune globulin?

Without Rh immune globulin, there is a 12 percent chance you will make Rh antibodies that can harm your baby. The risk increases with each pregnancy.

What are the side effects of Rh immune globulin?

Most people who get Rh immune globulin have no side effects. Rarely, it can cause:

- pain at the injection site
- fever (temperature over 38.5°C or 101.3°F)
- feeling weak and unwell (malaise)
- headache
- allergic reaction (e.g. hives), which is usually mild and goes away quickly

You will be monitored for at least 20 minutes after the injection. After that, if you experience any of the above symptoms call your physician. Seek medical attention if the symptoms are serious. Tell the staff that you have recently received an injection of Rh immune globulin (WinRho[®]).

This material is for information purposes only. Do not use it in place of medical advice, instruction, and/or treatment.

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