



## The Rh factor and Pregnancy

### *Rh Program of Nova Scotia*

Phone: **(902) 470-6458**

<http://rcp.nshealth.ca/rh>

**5850/5980 University Ave.  
PO Box 9700, Halifax, NS, B3K 6R8**

*This Rh Program patient/family guide is a  
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## What is the Rh Factor?

The Rh factor is a red blood cell protein that is found in 83% of people. Those who have this protein are Rh positive, and those who do not have this protein are Rh negative.

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

It is possible for an Rh negative pregnant person to carry an Rh positive fetus if their partner/sperm donor has passed on the Rh positive factor to the fetus. An Rh negative pregnant person may develop antibodies (a reaction) to the Rh positive blood type which is foreign to them. They may already have the antibodies at the start of the pregnancy or could first develop the antibodies during pregnancy if some of the Rh positive blood from the fetus gets into their circulation. These antibodies **will not** hurt them but can cross over to the fetus and break down the Rh positive blood cells of the fetus. **Future pregnancies** with an Rh positive fetus can be at higher risk because the body remembers how to make antibodies and will produce them more quickly and at higher amounts.

Pregnant persons have a blood test to find out what type of blood they have and if they have any antibodies to other blood types. This antibody test is done in early pregnancy and again at 26 to 28 weeks.

## How do Antibodies affect the Fetus or Newborn Baby?

If the pregnant person has antibodies that are against the fetus's blood type, these antibodies can cross over, attach to the blood cells and destroy them. This can cause anemia (low hemoglobin) before birth and even last for a while after birth.

When blood cells are broken down a product called bilirubin is made. Bilirubin is not a problem for the fetus but can cause jaundice (yellow skin) in a newborn baby. Babies who are jaundiced can be treated in different ways but most often by putting them under special fluorescent lights. This helps to break down and get rid of extra bilirubin. Having extra (high levels) of bilirubin can be harmful and it is important to keep the levels low for baby's health.

Blood tests and treatments are usually carried out in the hospital but may even continue after baby goes home.

## Can this Problem be Prevented?

Yes. An injection of **Rho(D) Immune Globulin**, also called WinRho® SDF can lower the chance of making antibodies from 1 out of 10 to 1 out of 1000 people.

## **What is Rh<sub>o</sub>(D) Immune Globulin (WinRho® SDF)?**

This product is made from the blood of people who have already made Rh antibodies. The blood from blood donors is tested for certain viruses (such as hepatitis B, C, and HIV). Steps are also done to destroy and remove any viruses from the blood. There are no reports of infections caused by WinRho®SDF. For more product information see [www.winrho.com](http://www.winrho.com).

## **When should I receive WinRho® SDF?**

It is given to Rh negative pregnant persons for vaginal bleeding, miscarriage, abortion, tubal pregnancy, abdominal injuries, routinely at 28 to 29 weeks of pregnancy and after an Rh positive baby is born.

## **Are there Side Effects?**

Soreness and some swelling from the needle site may happen in a small number of cases. Since there is a rare chance of a reaction to WinRho® SDF you will be asked to stay for 15 to 30 minutes after getting your injection. A reaction could be fever, chills, shaking, headache, or any feelings that are different from usual.

Please tell your doctor or health care provider if you have ever had a reaction to blood products or WinRho® SDF.

### **Will I need Injections with Future Pregnancies?**

Yes. The WinRho® SDF is usually gone from the blood-stream after a few months. That is why extra doses are needed for each new pregnancy.

### **What if my Partner/Sperm donor is also Rh Negative?**

WinRho® SDF is not needed if the partner/sperm donor is known for certain to be Rh negative. You can discuss this with your health care provider.

### **Will it Harm my Fetus?**

No. WinRho® SDF is given in such low doses that even if it gets into the fetus's blood it is not harmful.

### **What is the Role of the Rh Program?**

The **Rh Program of Nova Scotia** is a provincial program of IWK Health. We focus on the prevention and management of problems caused by Rh and other blood group antibodies. The Rh Program also provides an education and consultation service for health care providers.

This **Rh Program** patient/family guide is a shared resource by health care providers from:



IWK Health



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*\*This patient/family guide should not be used to replace advice from your health care provider(s). / \* Ce guide du patient/de la famille ne doit pas être utilisé pour remplacer les conseils de votre fournisseur de soins de santé.*

*\*Please, no scented products or fragrances at the IWK. /*

*\* Prière de ne pas porter de parfum et de ne pas utiliser de produits parfumés au IWK.*

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