

# Rh Factor Treatment in Pregnancy (RhoGAM)

## What is Rh factor?

Rh factor is an inherited protein (passed down from parent to child) that can be attached to your red blood cells. If your blood cells have this protein (like most people), you are **Rh-positive**. If they do not, you are **Rh-negative**. Your healthcare provider will do a blood test to find out if you are Rh-positive or Rh-negative.

Being Rh-negative is not an illness and usually does not affect your health. It can, however, affect your pregnancy.

## How does being Rh-negative affect my pregnancy?

If you are Rh-negative and your baby's father is Rh-positive (or the father's type is unknown), you have an **Rh factor mismatch**. If your baby is Rh-positive like the father, your immune system may treat the baby's blood cells as harmful invaders and make **antibodies** [AN-ti-bod-ees] against the baby's cells. If these antibodies pass back to your baby through the placenta, they begin to destroy the baby's blood cells.

The antibodies can also have these effects:

- **In your baby**, this can cause a condition called **Rh-induced hemolytic** [hee-muh-LIT-ik] **disease**. The effects of this disease can range from mild anemia [uh-NEE-mee-uh] and jaundice [JAWN-dis] to intellectual disability or even death.
- **In you**, the antibodies will usually remain present for the rest of your life. They could affect any baby you conceive in the future. They could also cause serious problems for you if you ever need an emergency blood transfusion.

## What do I need to do next?

- 1 Make a decision with your doctor about whether you should have a RhoGAM injection.
- 2 If you have a RhoGAM injection, have the baby's blood tested after your baby is born. If your baby has Rh-positive blood, you will need a second injection.
- 3 Discuss any questions and concerns with your doctor.

## How is an Rh factor mismatch treated?

If you and your baby's father have an Rh factor mismatch, your healthcare provider may recommend an injection (shot) of a medicine called **Rho(D) immune globulin** [GLOB-yuh-lin]. This medicine is often referred to by one of its brand names, **RhoGAM**.

Having an injection at the right time during or after pregnancy can lower your baby's risk of having a hemolytic disease. It is best to have a RhoGAM injection during pregnancy before your body has begun to make antibodies against your baby's blood cells. It is usually given about 26 to 28 weeks into the pregnancy.

An injection of this medicine:

- **Stops your body from making antibodies** against your baby's blood cells.
- **Protects your baby** against Rh-induced hemolytic disease.
- **Helps protect you** during any future pregnancy from making antibodies against your baby's blood cells.

# Talking with your healthcare provider about Rh factor treatment in pregnancy

The table below lists some possible benefits and risks of, and alternatives for, Rh factor treatment during pregnancy. Discuss these with your healthcare provider, and ask any questions you have.

Possible benefits	Risks and possible complications	Alternatives
<p>A RhoGAM injection can prevent Rh-induced hemolytic disease in your baby and can protect against these possible disease effects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anemia</li> <li>• Jaundice</li> <li>• Heart failure</li> <li>• Neurological problems such as an intellectual disability, hearing loss, speech and movement disorders, and seizures</li> <li>• Stillbirth or infant death</li> </ul>	<p>When a woman receives a RhoGAM injection, there are no known risks for her baby. Risks and possible complications for the woman include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pain or tenderness at the injection site.</li> <li>• Side effects from the medicine, such as muscle aches or pains; a headache; feeling tired or light-headed; and nausea or vomiting.</li> <li>• Allergic reaction to the medicine.</li> <li>• Infection with a virus or bacteria. (The medicine is made from human blood, so even though it is screened and treated for safety, there is still a very small risk of a bloodborne infection.)</li> </ul>	<p>A RhoGAM injection may not be recommended if you have certain allergies or conditions. You can choose not to have a RhoGAM injection, <b>but that choice isn't recommended due to the possible risks to your baby and any future pregnancies.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Understand that you cannot postpone your decision very long.</b> For the medicine to work, it must be given at the right time.</li> <li>• If you are pregnant and choose not to receive a RhoGAM injection, <b>your baby will need to be closely monitored</b> for any health problems.</li> </ul>

## My follow-up appointment

Date/Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Place: \_\_\_\_\_

Doctor: \_\_\_\_\_

## Questions for my doctor

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