



The Rh (Rhesus) factor is a protein found on the surface of blood cells. About 85% of Canadians have it. Their blood type is Rh+ (positive). About 15% of Canadians do not have the protein. Their blood type is Rh- (negative).

People are born with their blood type. It cannot be changed.

### ***Rh Factor and Pregnancy***

Rh factor is not an issue in pregnancy for Rh+ people. There may be a concern for some pregnant Rh- people.

When a Rh- person is pregnant with a Rh+ fetus, their blood types are not compatible. During pregnancy or delivery, Rh+ blood from the fetus can enter the pregnant person's bloodstream. Their body then makes antibodies against the Rh+ blood. In first pregnancies, these antibodies don't usually harm the fetus.

There may be a problem if the Rh- person has another Rh+ fetus in a future pregnancy. Antibodies made in the first pregnancy can pass through the placenta and attack the red blood cells of the fetus.

When the red blood cells are destroyed faster than they are made, the fetus may develop a type of severe anemia. It is known as:

- » Rh alloimmunization
- » hemolytic disease of the fetus or newborn
- » HDN or HDFN
- » erythroblastosis fetalis

### ***How to prevent Rh problems***

All pregnant people should be tested for the Rh factor. This usually happens in the first prenatal visit.

Rh- people are tested for Rh antibodies throughout their pregnancy. If they have no antibodies, and the source of the sperm for the pregnancy is (or might be) Rh+, they are offered an injection (needle) at 28 weeks of pregnancy, and again within 72 hours after giving birth.

The injection is Rh Immune Globulin (RhIG). It stops the body from making Rh antibodies. It is called WinRho®.

It also may be required after:

- » a miscarriage, abortion, or ectopic pregnancy
- » vaginal bleeding during pregnancy
- » abdominal trauma during pregnancy
- » manually turning a fetus in breech position



## UNDERSTANDING THE RH FACTOR

If a pregnant Rh- person has made Rh antibodies, their fetus will be closely monitored. If there are signs of severe anemia, a healthcare provider may suggest early delivery or intrauterine blood transfusion.

If you have questions about the Rh factor, please ask your healthcare provider or call Health Links at 204-788-8200 (in Winnipeg) or 1-888-315-9257 (outside Winnipeg).

*Disclaimer: WHC provides health information for your learning only. It should not be used to replace a visit with a healthcare provider.*