



## Anti-D Information Sheet

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### The Rhesus factor – what does it mean to have a negative blood group?

We have all heard of blood groups, A, B, AB and O, but there is also a Rhesus or Rh factor. Most people have the Rh factor – their blood group is Rh positive. If your blood group is type A and you have the Rh factor, your blood type is known as “A positive”. Some people do not have the Rh factor and their blood groups are known as Rh negative.

### How do you get the Rh factor?

The Rh factor is a protein that is translated from a gene and it is inherited from your parents (or not). The Rh factor is expressed on the surface of your red blood cells. Having just one copy or dose of the Rh factor makes your blood cells Rh positive. You can be Rh positive if you inherited just one copy of the Rh factor (from one of your parents) or a “double dose” or two copies of the Rh factor (a copy from each of your parents).

If neither of your parents passed down a copy of the Rh factor to you, then you are “Rh negative”. This means no Rh factor is expressed on your red blood cells’ surface at all.

### What’s the problem being Rh negative?

Here’s where things get a little complicated.

The Rh factor can be inherited from either parent. Only one Rh copy is needed for a baby to have a Rh positive blood group. If a baby’s father (or sperm donor) has an Rh positive blood group, the baby’s blood group might turn out to be Rh positive.

If a mother who is Rh negative has a baby who is Rh positive, the mother’s immune system can become “Rh sensitised”. This means the mother’s immune defences can recognise the baby’s blood as foreign and attack the baby. This problem is called Rh incompatibility.

It usually does not occur in a first pregnancy, but can occur in a later pregnancy. Women can be Rh sensitised by an

