

**Rh (D) factor, Red Blood Cell Antibodies and Rh Immune Globulin:
Information for Rh-Negative Women¹ and Families Following a Pregnancy Loss** July 2022

KEYPOINTS:

WHAT IS RH FACTOR AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

- Rh factor (D) is a protein present on the red blood cells of 70-95% of people depending on their race
- People who do not carry Rh factor on the red blood cells are called Rh-negative. It does not affect their health.
 - If an Rh-negative person gets exposed to Rh-positive Red cells from another person, they can form substances called antibodies which can destroy the Rh-positive red cells. It is a part of our immune system protection response
- In pregnancy, there is mixing of the unborn babies' blood with mother. If the baby carries Rh factor on its red blood cells (Rh-positive), mother can form antibodies which go to baby's blood circulation and break down its red blood cells (hemolysis).
- If you have experienced a pregnancy or pregnancy loss, having the antibodies can cause problems with future pregnancies and future blood transfusions.

HOW DO I FIND OUT IF I AM RH-NEGATIVE OR POSITIVE?

- Your blood is tested in early pregnancy to find out your blood group and Rh status. This test is ordered by your healthcare provider.

WHAT DETERMINES THE RH STATUS OF A BABY?

- Baby gets half of his genes from mother and half from father. If baby's father is positive for Rh, the baby can have red blood cells which are Rh-positive.

HOW CAN I LOWER MY RISK OF HEMOLYTIC DISEASE DUE TO RH FACTOR IN FUTURE PREGNANCIES?

- If you don't already have Rh antibodies in your blood, receiving WinRho[®] will help you prevent Rh disease from developing.
- WinRho[®] is a blood product that is given whenever there is a chance of an Rh-negative pregnant woman forming antibodies. WinRho[®] is made from human blood and goes through all tests needed (for Hepatitis B, C and HIV) to make it safe to take.

WHAT DOES WINRHO DO?

- WinRho[®] works by helping the body clear the Rh-positive red cells that have been transferred from the baby's blood to the woman's blood. If Rh positive red cells have been cleared, the woman will not form the harmful antibodies. WinRho[®] will not harm you.

WinRho[®] cannot cause harm to the red blood cells of an Rh-negative person.

HOW DO I GET WINRHO[®]?

- WinRho[®] is available at no cost to you. Your family doctor, midwife or obstetrician can give it to at the time of the loss or delivery. If you are Rh-negative, it is important that you receive WinRho[®] before you are sent home from hospital.
- WinRho[®] is injected into a muscle with a needle or into a vein through an intravenous (IV) line.
- The dose of WinRho[®] is determined based on a fetomaternal hemorrhage (FMH) test that is collected after delivery.

¹Inclusivity annotation: This information was written using language supporting women at the center of care. PRAMS is committed to respecting the rights of all people. This includes transgender, gender non-binary, and intersex people that may find this information helpful. Healthcare providers should have respectful conversation with patients about their gender identity and be sure that preferred gender pronouns are used to provide safe and appropriate care.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF RECEIVING WINRHO?

- As with any needle, if WinRho® is injected into the muscle, it will probably feel sore.
- If you are currently breastfeeding a child, it is still safe for you to receive WinRho®.
- A few people get headache, fever, chills or nausea. You will be asked to stay for 20 minutes after your WinRho® injection, so that you can be watched for these signs.

When in doubt, check it out!!!!

Contact your health care provided right away if you experience any of the following within 6 hours after getting WinRho®:

- Fever over 38°C or chills
- Weakness, dizziness from low blood pressure or feeling light headed
- Fast heart rate
- Itching, rash or hives
- Shortness of breath

WHAT HAPPENS IF I CHOOSE TO GET WINRHO?

- Your healthcare provider will talk with you about the risks and benefits of WinRho®. This is a good time to ask any other questions you may have.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I CHOOSE NOT TO GET WINRHO?

- Some people are not comfortable receiving any human blood product. If you have concerns about having this treatment, talk to your health care provider. You always have the choice to refuse any treatment.

It is important to understand that without WinRho®:

- There are no other effective treatments to prevent Rh disease. WinRho® is the only way to prevent Rh red blood cell problems that may arise (hemolytic disease) in future babies.
- Rh problems get worse with each pregnancy you have for both you and your unborn baby.
- If you choose not to get WinRho® your healthcare provider will ask you to say so clearly and write down your choice.

- **WinRho® is the only way to stop Rh disease. It is up to you to choose if you want this treatment.**
- **If you have questions, ask your health care provider.**

Important Notes:

- WinRho® does NOT contain Mercury or other preservatives.
- WinRho® does NOT contain any red blood cells or other blood cells. Please review the information from JW Watchtower about WinRho® administration in Jehovah's Witnesses. <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lpe/101994890>
- It is important to still get WinRho® even if you are done having children because you could develop harmful antibodies that can affect what type of blood you would need in a future surgery/emergency.

PRAMS is a provincial program of the Saskatchewan Health Authority. PRAMS focuses on the *Prevention of Alloimmunization in Mothers of Saskatchewan* by supporting healthcare providers in their care of pregnant patients who are at risk of forming antibodies. PRAMS Registered Nurse Specialists can assist healthcare providers and their patients in understanding how to manage antibody risks during pregnancy. For questions or further learning, a PRAMS Nurse Coordinator can be contacted at prams@saskhealthauthority.ca Permission to photocopy.

Healthy People, Healthy Saskatchewan

The Saskatchewan Health Authority works in the spirit of truth and reconciliation, acknowledging Saskatchewan as the traditional territory of First Nations and Métis People.

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