Rhesus Negativity & Anti-D

There are several blood groups including A, B, AB and O. Also blood is either rhesus positive or rhesus negative (for example B+ or O-). The rhesus type you have is dependent on the blood group of both your parents. For this reason, children may have a different blood group to their parents.

**What is Rhesus negativity?**

When a woman who has rhesus negative blood carries a rhesus positive pregnancy, the blood cells from the foetus can enter her blood stream. This would normally only happen at the time of birth, or during an event such as a miscarriage or termination. Her immune system will treat the blood cells from the foetus as foreign and respond by making antibodies against them.

The immune system has a good memory and this means that in any future pregnancies where the foetus is again rhesus positive, large amounts of these antibodies can be made rapidly and may cross the placenta and destroy the foetus’ blood cells, causing serious complications such as severe anaemia.

By giving an injection of rhesus antibodies known as Anti-D, the woman’s immune system is prevented from making antibodies against future pregnancies.

**When should immunisation occur?**

Only women who are a rhesus negative blood group will receive an Anti-D injection. To be effective this must be given as soon as possible within 72 hours of a sensitising event, such as termination of pregnancy, before the woman’s immune system has the chance to make its own antibodies.

**Are there any risks?**

Anti-D is made from the plasma (liquid part of blood) of carefully selected blood donors. In Australia, there has never been a confirmed case of transmission of viruses such as hepatitis B or C or HIV from Anti-D products supplied in Australia.