

sextalk.

answers to your questions about sex and relationships

factoid

85% of Americans are Rh positive, 15% are Rh negative. The Basque people of Spain and France have the greatest incidence of Rh negative blood in the world at over 30%.

Q. What risks does a negative Rh factor pose for women's health?

A. An Rh factor, named after the Rhesus Macaque monkeys that led to their discovery, describe a type of protein found on red blood cells. If you happen to have this protein, you are considered Rh positive (most people are). If you do not, you are Rh negative. Blood donors will recall that a positive or negative sign follows each blood type (A, B, AB or O), indicating the presence of the Rh antigen.

A negative Rh factor does not pose a problem for women at most points in their life with one significant exception: during pregnancy, this trait can lead to incompatibility between a mother and her developing child. When this occurs, a small amount of Rh positive blood from the baby (inherited from an Rh positive father) can come into contact with an Rh negative mother through the placenta. This results in an "allergic" response to the fetus, which can cause anemia and a host of problems for the child, including heart failure, respiratory distress and even death.

Most of the time during that first pregnancy, the child is born prior to the mom's antibody response. During subsequent pregnancies, however, there is much higher likelihood that those same antigens will attack fetal blood cells and cause anemia. Fortunately, these problems can be prevented through proper screening and use of Rh immunoglobulin (RhIg), a medication derived from human plasma, during a woman's first pregnancy. RhIg prevents sensitization to a positive fetal Rh factor and is very effective when administered at the 28th week of pregnancy and again within 72 hours following childbirth.

If you would like to donate blood and learn your blood type and Rh factor in the process, stop by the Red Cross blood drive on Tuesday, February 17th (tomorrow) at Campus Health from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm, located in the Highland Commons Building near 6th St. and Highland Ave. Need another reason? Each precious pint that is donated can go on to save up to three lives.



Have a question? Send it to sextalk@email.arizona.edu

SexTalk is written by Lee Ann Hamilton, M.A., CHES and David Salafsky, MPH, health educators at The University of Arizona Campus Health Service.

