

Rh Factor Case Study

Name: Gwen H.

Diagnosed with: Rh factor

My Story

Gwen H. was pregnant with her third child in 1966. During a routine blood check and pre-natal screening she learned that her baby had a different Rh-factor as his blood type.

“Both of my other children were a little premature, and had needed blood transfusions after they were born,” so the news that her third child, a boy, was also a different blood type came as no surprise to her.

Rh sensitization is an antibody response that may occur during pregnancy when a woman with Rh-negative blood is exposed to blood from her Rh-positive fetus. Once the mother is exposed to Rh-positive fetal blood, her immune system produces antibodies that can destroy the fetus's Rh-positive red blood cells.

An Rh factor (Rh antigen) is one of the markers on the surface of red blood cells that the immune system can recognize. A person whose blood contains the Rh factor is Rh-positive. A person whose blood does not contain the Rh factor is Rh-negative. An Rh-negative woman can only become pregnant with an Rh-positive fetus if the father is Rh-positive.

Rh sensitization is no danger to the pregnant woman and usually is no harm to the first Rh-positive fetus. However, future Rh-positive fetuses are in danger of having their red blood cells destroyed by the mother's immune system. This danger can usually be prevented by giving the woman an RH immunoglobulin injection.

In this case, not only did Gwen receive the RH immunoglobulin, but her new born son also received a blood transfusion to boost his Rh-positive red cells and to ensure that his lungs would be healthy enough to function properly after birth.

Gwen has some important advice for women who have recently discovered that they are pregnant; “Make sure that you get all the facts from your doctors and pay attention to your family medical history.”

While Rh-factor testing is generally routine in the early stages of pregnancy, treatment with an RH immunoglobulin injection at the stage of fetal development can help ensure that you give birth to a healthy baby.