

Patient Fact Sheet

Special Blood Requirement - Red Blood Cell (RBC) Antibodies

What are RBC antibodies?

When you are exposed to RBCs through a blood transfusion or pregnancy, sometimes your immune system will form an antibody to the donor RBCs.

Antibodies are usually formed by the body as part of its normal defense system. For example, your body will develop antibodies to foreign bacteria or viruses which help to fight infection. In this case, your body recognized a protein on the donor's or (in the case of pregnancy) your baby's RBCs that was different from yours and you formed an antibody against it.

Does everyone who receives a blood transfusion form an antibody?

Only a small percentage of people (about 7 out of every 100) who have been pregnant or transfused will form an antibody. Patients who have had many blood transfusions or multiple pregnancies may have a higher risk of forming an antibody.

How does it affect me?

If you receive a blood transfusion that is not matched for the antibody you have, there is a risk that the blood you receive will not provide you with the maximum benefit and may even result in a transfusion reaction.

Depending on the type of antibody you have, it may take more time to find blood that is a suitable match for you. It is important to let your physician know about this antibody as soon as possible if a blood transfusion is being considered for you.

If you are pregnant, your antibody can pass through your circulation to your baby's. If the baby's RBCs are not a match with the antibody, your physician will monitor you and your baby carefully throughout your pregnancy to make sure the appropriate care and treatment can be initiated as required.

- Please carry the attached card with you and show it to your physician or nurse if a blood transfusion is being considered and/or if you are pregnant.
- Consider registering with a medical alert program (such as MedicAlert®) that will identify your need for blood lacking the antigen corresponding to the antibody identified in your blood to first responders and physicians in case of emergencies.