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AMDI Magazine

e-issn 2735-041X, Volume 5, Issue 1 (2024)

Expert Column

I'm RH Negative

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PUBLISHED : 28 FEBRUARY 2024

What is Rh Blood group system?

The Rh blood group was previously known as the “Rhesus” blood group system. The term “Rhesus” was chosen after the rhesus monkey, which were used in the early research to produce antiserum for typing of red blood cells. There are many antigens that fall under the Rh blood group system with the clinically significant antigens being D, C, E, c and e antigens.

Who is Rh positive and Rh negative?

Of all the Rh antigens, D antigen is the most significant, and its presence or absence is used to determine whether an individual is Rh positive or Rh negative. Those who have D antigen on the surface of red cells are termed Rh positive, while those who lack the D antigen are term Rh negative.

How do you know a donor is Rh positive or Rh negative?

This is done by adding antibody against the D antigen (Anti-D antiserum) to the donor’s red cells. If the red cells show clumping, it means the donor is Rh negative. This Rh testing only carried out in the laboratory after the donor has donated his or her blood. If the donor is found to be Rh negative, he or she will be notified by the Blood Transfusion Service. If no notification is received, it means the donor is Rh positive. A special laminated card is given to this rare donor indicating their Rh negative status.

How common is Rh negative donors in Malaysia?

About 99% of Malaysians have been found to be Rh positive. In other words, only about 1% of Malaysian are Rh negative. It has also been found that Rh negative is higher among Indians and Punjabis, about 5%, compared to other ethnic groups.

How often can Rh negative donor donate blood?

Same like Rh positive donors. Whole blood can be donated 4 times in a year.

Can Rh negative patient receive Rh positive blood?

An Rh negative patient that requires red cell transfusion should only be transfuse with Rh negative blood. However, in life saving situation where Rh negative blood is not available, Rh positive may be given (only if the patient does not have antibody against the D antigen).

Is there any problem being Rh D negative?

The health of an Rh negative person is not affected in any way. However, an Rh negative female in her second and subsequent pregnancies, is at risk of having a baby with a neonatal jaundice if she conceives a baby with an Rh positive father and the baby inherits the father's Rh positive blood type.

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