

WHAT IS A BLOOD TYPE?

AND WHY IS MINE DIFFERENT?

Background

The blood type is the way we classify red blood cells. Blood types are determined by the presence of substances on the red blood cells. ABO is one of the blood types. Rhesus, or “RhD” refers to the RhD blood type. Blood types are inherited from the parents.

Blood types in the population

Group O	Group A	Group B	Group AB
RhD positive 38%	RhD positive 33%	RhD positive 9%	RhD positive 3%
RhD negative 8%	RhD negative 7%	RhD negative 2%	RhD negative 1%

Blood typing

Blood typing is done in several situations: when a patient needs a transfusion; when a woman is pregnant; when a baby has just been born, or when a patient needs to have a transplant. Routine blood typing depends on the blood type substances being present in sufficient quantities.

Blood type differences

In some people, there are low amounts of the RhD blood type substance on the red blood cell. The low levels of RhD substance can cause the blood typing results to not always be accurate. This phenomena is called the “weak D” blood type. Sometimes, people with weak D will be told their blood type has changed, or that the results are incorrect. The reason this happens is that it is difficult to detect low levels of RhD substance with routine blood typing; some blood typing tests are sensitive enough, and others are not.

Medical impact of weak D

The red blood cell serves an important function in your body; it carries oxygen to the organs. Blood typing is important to guide blood transfusion and to make decisions about RhoGam for women. Although the weak D blood type can be confusing for patients, nurses and doctors, it is not harmful.

What can I do?

If you have been told your blood type has changed or is not able to be determined, or that you have the weak D blood type, genetic testing of the blood type can resolve the issue once and for all. Talk to your doctor about the testing.

If I have weak D blood type, do I need RhoGam?

If a woman is pregnant, or has recently given birth, and has the weak D blood type, RhoGam may or may not be needed. The best way to determine if RhoGam is needed is to have genetic testing of the blood type (RBC genotyping for weak D) because some patients with weak D types need RhoGam and some do not. Weak D genotype testing takes time, so if weak D blood type is discovered at the time of birth, your doctor may decide to administer RhoGam and have the weak D genetic testing done to clarify your blood type for future pregnancies.