

Fetal *RHD* Screening User Guide



Cell-free fetal DNA screening for D blood group to determine need for anti-D prophylaxis during pregnancy

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This guide outlines the cell-free fetal DNA screening service for determination of fetal D blood group in D negative pregnant women to guide the requirement for antenatal anti-D prophylaxis. High-throughput non-invasive prenatal testing for fetal *RHD* genotype is recommended by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) as a cost-effective option to guide antenatal prophylaxis with anti-D immunoglobulin¹. Tools to put this NICE guidance into practice are available <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/dg25/resources>.

This user guide is written for obstetricians, midwives and scientific staff in hospital transfusion laboratories and others involved in antenatal care. The International Blood Group Reference Laboratory (IBGRL) provides specialist diagnostics services to NHS Blood and Transplant (NHSBT). The Molecular Diagnostics department is an accredited laboratory and all work is carried out within the framework of a documented quality system. The department regularly participates in external quality assurance exercises to predict fetal RhD blood group from maternal blood. Information about patients and donors is held in compliance with the Data Protection and Freedom of Information Acts.

This guide concerns fetal D blood group testing for pregnant women **who have not made anti-D** and who require the test to determine their need for antenatal anti-D prophylaxis. To refer samples from women who have made anti-D antibodies, please consult [INF1135](#) 'User Guide for referring samples to IBGRL Molecular Diagnostics' (there is a different referral form and sample requirement). See the IBGRL website <http://ibgrl.blood.co.uk>

Laboratory contact details

Website <http://hospital.blood.co.uk/diagnostic-services/red-cell-immunohaematology/antenatal-screening-services/#fetal>

If you are a potential new customer for the NHSBT Fetal *RHD* screening service, please contact Erika Rutherford, Business Development Manager: erika.rutherford@nhsbt.nhs.uk

Enquiries from existing customers, to order request forms / leaflets, or for current price list, please contact the Molecular Diagnostics laboratory:

Tel: 0117 921 7572

Email: molecular.diagnostics@nhsbt.nhs.uk

Postal address for samples:

Molecular Diagnostics
International Blood Group Reference Laboratory
NHS Blood and Transplant
500 North Bristol Park
Northway
Filton
BS34 7QH

Normal working hours: Monday to Friday 09:00 – 17:00

Customer complaints and suggestions

IBGRL Molecular Diagnostics is committed to continuously improving the quality and range of services provided and welcomes any comments or suggestions from users. Please contact the Laboratory Manager or Head of Department in the first instance regarding complaints and suggestions. Complaints are managed via our Quality Management system or Customer Services as appropriate. We always strive to provide a satisfactory response to any complaint. In the unlikely event that your complaint is not resolved to your satisfaction please refer to the NHSBT complaints procedure <http://hospital.blood.co.uk/customer-services/complaints-compliments-and-feedback/>

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Technical aspects, limitations of the test and factors affecting test performance

During pregnancy a small amount of cell-free fetal DNA is present in maternal blood. This DNA can be analysed for *RHD* exons 5 and 7 using real-time polymerase chain reaction to predict the baby's D blood group to see if it differs from that of the mother. The test is highly accurate and can be performed from 11⁺² weeks gestation (crown rump length \geq 45mm).^{2,3} However, owing to the sensitivity of the test, there is a small chance (0.1%) that a fetus predicted to be D negative will be D positive at birth. Please inform the Molecular Diagnostics department as soon as possible if this occurs, and send a sample of cord blood if available. Owing to the presence of rare variant *RHD* genes, up to 2% of fetuses predicted to be D positive will in fact be D negative at birth.

The amount of fetal DNA in maternal blood increases throughout gestation, therefore it is essential that maternal blood is not taken before 11⁺² weeks gestation. Samples taken too early in gestation will not be tested.

Blood samples which have significantly haemolysed may contain a very high background of maternal DNA which could interfere with detection of fetal DNA. Therefore haemolysed samples will not be tested.

Samples from women carrying multiple babies can be tested. A D positive test result means that at least one fetus is predicted to be D positive. A D negative test result means that all the fetuses are predicted to be D negative.

Request forms, samples, labelling requirements

Request forms

Request form [FRM5197](#) can be ordered free of charge from IBGRL. Trusts wishing to use their own electronically generated referral form must have the form approved by NHSBT before sending samples.

Patient information leaflets

INF1263 Mother's blood test to check her unborn baby's blood group is available free of charge from IBGRL

Samples / labelling of samples/ completion of request forms

Samples will only be accepted for testing if the following conditions are met:

Sample requirements

It is the responsibility of the test requester to ensure that patient consent has been obtained.

A minimum of 6mL maternal EDTA blood (pink or purple blood tubes).

The sample tube must not be opened following blood collection or used for any testing prior being sent to IBGRL.

The sample tube must be stored at room temperature prior to reaching the laboratory within 7 days following venepuncture and must not be lysed on receipt.

Samples **MUST** be labelled, dated and signed by the person taking the blood.

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Labels pre-printed prior to phlebotomy e.g. addressograph labels, are not acceptable on samples. They are, however, acceptable on request forms providing they do not obscure other vital details

Samples must have handwritten labels unless demand printed labels are produced at the time of phlebotomy. NHSBT must be informed in writing if demand printed labels are in use. Hand written alterations on either the sample or request form may make the sample invalid for testing. Any minor alterations must be initialled by the person taking the sample to be acceptable for testing.

Request form [FRM5197](#) must accompany every sample unless the hospital trust's electronically generated request form has been approved by NHSBT. Instructions for completing FRM5197 are detailed in [INF1340](#) available at <http://hospital.blood.co.uk/diagnostic-services/red-cell-immunohaematology/antenatal-screening-services/#fetal>

Request forms are the basis of the correct identification of the patient. The points of identification provided on the request form must match the information provided on the sample. NHSBT will not normally test samples unless three or more identical points of identification are used on both forms and tubes.

Minimum patient identification

- Surname/family name and first name/s in full (surname and first name are one identifier).
- NHS number or hospital number (the same number must be on both the tube and the form)
- Date of birth

The following information must also be provided

- Date of venepuncture
- Estimated delivery date (by scan)

Samples which do not meet the above specification will be rejected at receipt.

Packaging of samples

It is the responsibility of the sender to ensure that all samples are packaged in accordance with the current European Agreement concerning Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road Regulations (packaging instructions 650) to prevent breakage or spillage in transit. The outside of the box or package containing the samples must be clearly addressed to the appropriate department.

Transport of samples

Samples and referral forms should be sent to the hospital pathology (or Send Away) laboratory for forwarding to the NHSBT postal address above using NHSBT transport. Samples must be received at IBGRL within 7 days of venepuncture.

Turnaround time for results

The Molecular Diagnostics department aims to report 98% of samples within 10 business days of receiving the sample. Customers will be informed by email or phone in the unlikely event that a delay is anticipated.

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Reports

Reports are issued to the hospital blood transfusion laboratory (or other referring laboratory) via the sp-ICE reporting system. If paper reports are required, these may be provided for an additional administration charge by prior arrangement with NHSBT.

Customers should contact their local hospital transfusion laboratory for fetal RhD blood group results in the first instance.

Additional requests

Residual maternal plasma samples will be archived for nine months from date of receipt and will be re-tested in the rare circumstance that an incorrect D negative test result is brought to the attention of NHSBT. Additional test requests cannot be requested for the archived plasma.

Our requirements of the requester

In order to ensure the standards of our service are maintained and to aid improvement, we try to monitor the accuracy of our testing procedures. **If the fetal *RHD* screening test has predicted a fetal D negative phenotype, and serological testing of cord blood indicates a D positive baby, please inform us as soon as possible by email: molecular.diagnostics@nhsbt.nhs.uk or telephone. Please retain a sample of cord blood and forward it to IBGRL Molecular Diagnostics for further investigation.**

References:

1. High-throughput non-invasive prenatal testing for fetal RHD genotype. <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/dg25>
2. Diagnostic accuracy of routine antenatal determination of fetal *RHD* status across gestation: population based cohort study. Chitty, L et al, *BMJ*: (2014): 349
3. Use of cfDNA to avoid administration of anti-D to pregnant women when the fetus is RhD-negative: implementation in the NHS. Soothill, P et al. *BJOG*, 2015 Nov;122(12):1682-6.