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1. What is an antibody?

Antibodies are proteins produced by white blood cells and released into the blood stream. They are a natural part of the body's defense system. They are produced when the white blood cells detect a substance/antigen that they think is foreign in the body. All red cells have naturally occurring antigens. When white cells detect a red cell antigen from baby's or transfused red cells that it does not recognize it can produce an antibody to those red cells

2. Is it dangerous to me or my baby to have an antibody?

There are different types of red cell antibodies and some that are called clinically significant can affect your baby. When the laboratories detects an antibody they send a report to your midwife/doctor so that they can monitor you more closely during your pregnancy. Non-clinically significant antibodies pose very little risk to you or your baby.

3. Where do antibodies come from?

Red blood cell antibodies are produced when the white blood cells come across foreign substances in the blood stream that they do not recognize. These substances are referred to as antigens. There are two types of red cell antibodies

1. Naturally occurring - they are produced in the body with no known cause or antigen stimulus but are directed at antigens not found in the mum
2. Immune – they are produced as a result of a blood transfusion or during pregnancy if a very small number of your baby's cells enter your blood stream.

4. Why is this antibody showing up now when I have had blood tests before with no antibody?

Antibodies can develop at any time, there is no way to know when they will develop.

That is why at your booking visit for each pregnancy or when you are admitted to the hospital blood samples are taken to check for any antibodies.

5. I have never had a blood transfusion, why do I have this antibody?

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- Immune – they are produced when a very small number of your baby's cells enter your blood stream.

6. Will this antibody go away?

Some antibodies may go away. Some will be at a low level that is no longer possible for the laboratory to detect and some will always be present. This depends on the type / name of the antibody detected.

7. Do I need to tell my GP or other specialist medical service about this antibody?

Yes please do show this letter to the medical staff if you ever require hospital treatment and inform your doctor/midwife during your pregnancy. If you forget the hospital laboratories will still be able to detect the antibodies and find suitable blood for you if you need it.