Excessive Fluid Around the Lungs (Pleural Effusion)
Patient Education

Pleural effusion is the collection of too much fluid in the space around the lungs, called the pleural space. The fluid may be caused by many different things, including:

- Infection.
- Reaction to a medication.
- Radiation therapy.
- Cancer.

When to call your doctor: Danger signs to watch for:

- Shortness of breath.
- Cough.
- Chest pain or chest tightness.
- Feeling tired all the time.

If you have these symptoms, your doctor may order an x-ray of your chest, or an ultrasound of your lungs. If the test shows that you have too much fluid around your lungs (pleural fluid), it may be necessary to remove the extra fluid around your lung.

There are two procedures that can be used to drain the fluid:

- **Thoracentesis**
  If there is a small amount of fluid seen it can be drained by putting a needle through your skin and chest wall then removing the needle once the fluid has drained. This procedure is called a thoracentesis (thor-a-sen-te-sus).

- **Chest Tube**
  For larger amounts of fluid or if the fluid returns after draining, a larger tube may be put through your skin into the space to drain the fluid. This procedure is called placing a chest tube. The chest tube will remain...
in place until the fluid around your lung is drained. Your doctor may put medicine in the tube to help prevent the fluid from coming back. This may take a few days and will require you to be in the hospital.

The fluid drained (needle or tube) may be sent to a lab to determine what is causing the fluid to accumulate around your lung(s).

A chest x-ray will be done to determine if the thoracentesis or chest tube placement has successfully drained the extra fluid around your lungs.

Because these procedures cause pain, you will receive local numbing and pain medication before the procedure. If you feel pain during the procedure let your doctor know so they can give you more medication. If a chest tube is placed you will continue to receive pain medication either by mouth or through a vein as needed until the tube is removed.

One of the risks with thoracentesis is that, while performing these procedures, your lung could collapse. This is called a pneumothorax. If this occurs, you may need to have a chest tube placed.

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