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## **Thoracentesis A Patient Guide**

### **What is a thoracentesis?**

Thoracentesis is a procedure to remove fluid from the space between the lungs and the chest wall called the pleural space. A needle or sometimes a plastic catheter is inserted through the chest wall. Ultrasound pictures are often used to guide the placement of the needle. The pleural fluid that is obtained is sent to a lab to determine what may be causing the fluid to build up in the pleural space.

A small amount of pleural fluid present in the pleural space is considered normal. A buildup of excess pleural fluid (pleural effusion) may be caused by many conditions, such as infection, inflammation, heart failure or cancer. If a large amount of fluid is present, it may be hard to breathe.

Fluid inside the pleural space may be found during a physical examination and is usually confirmed by a chest x-ray.

### **Why is a thoracentesis done?**

Thoracentesis may be done to:

- Find the cause of excess fluid (pleural effusion).
- Relieve shortness of breath and pain caused by a pleural effusion.

### **What can I expect with a thoracentesis?**

- A doctor will explain the procedure and discuss any risks with you and have you sign a consent form.
- Certain conditions may increase the difficulty of the thoracentesis. Let your doctor know if you have:

- A long term (chronic) and irreversible lung disease, such as emphysema.
- Have had lung surgery (the scarring from the procedure may make it difficult to perform the procedure.)

### **Tell your doctor if you:**

- **Are taking medications**
- **Have allergies to any medications**
- **Have a bleeding problem or take blood thinners (i.e. aspirin, warafin, etc.)**
- **Are or might be pregnant**

A chest x-ray is usually done before the procedure.

The site between the ribs will be cleaned with antiseptic solution. You will receive a local anesthetic. Once numb, your doctor will insert the needle to where the fluid has collected (pleural space). A small vial or tube is used to collect the fluid. A second x-ray may be taken after the procedure to make sure there are no complications.

### **Are there any risks to this procedure?**

Thoracentesis is generally a safe procedure although there is always a risk. Complications may include:

- A partial collapse of the lung (pneumothorax). This may occur if the needle used to remove the fluid, punctures the lung and allows air to flow into the pleural space.
- Pulmonary edema, which may occur if a large amount of fluid is removed.
- Infection or bleeding.
- Damage to liver or spleen, though this is rare.