Pleural Effusion

You have a pleural effusion. This means you have fluid in the space between your lung and your chest wall. This condition may result from many different problems including:

- Pleurisy or inflammation of the lining of the lung.
- Lung infections such as pneumonia.
- Blood clots, heart disease, chest injuries, cancer, and other medical problems.

A pleural effusion may not cause any symptoms. If it is large, however, it can make you short of breath. Other symptoms include cough, chest pain, or fever. The diagnosis of a pleural effusion is most often made by chest x-ray, CT, or ultrasound studies. A sample of the fluid can be taken using local anesthetic and a needle or catheter placed between the ribs. This procedure may be needed to determine the cause of the effusion, or to treat a large effusion.

Treatment is specific to the cause, such as antibiotics for infections. Mild pain or anti-inflammatory medicines may be helpful in relieving symptoms. Chronic effusions often have to be periodically drained. It is very important that you see your doctor or a specialist to be sure the effusion is not from a serious medical condition. A follow-up chest x-ray is usually needed.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF YOU DEVELOP:

- Shortness of breath
- Increased pain
- A high fever

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