

Pleural Effusion

What is a pleural effusion?

Your body produces small amounts of fluid between two thin layers called the pleural linings. The fluid keeps the area around the lungs slippery. One lining surrounds the lung, and another lines the chest cavity. The area between the two linings is called the pleural space. When too much fluid builds up in this space, it is called a pleural effusion.

What causes a pleural effusion?

- Blocked blood vessels or lymph vessels
- Cancer
- Congestive heart failure
- Inflammation or infection
- Lung injury

What are the signs?

- Chest pain
- Cough
- Fever
- Hiccups
- Rapid breathing
- Shortness of breath

Treatment of Pleural Effusion

Treatment for a pleural effusion has these goals:

- Remove the excess fluid
- Find and treat the cause of the fluid buildup
- Prevent fluid from building up again

The type of treatment depends on the cause of the fluid buildup. Doctors may place small tubes to drain the fluid at home. If you have this treatment, talk with your health care team for instructions.

Sometimes doctors use a needle to draw out the fluid. This is called *thoracentesis*.

Some patients need medicines so they make more urine. This helps remove extra fluid from the body.

Possible Complications of Treatment

- Air in the chest cavity
- Infection that turns into an abscess
- Lung damage

When to Call Your Doctor

- Call your cancer care team if you have any signs of a pleural effusion.
- Call your cancer care team right away or go to the emergency room if either of these things happens after treatment for pleural effusion:
 - Shortness of breath
 - Difficult breathing
 - Bleeding you cannot control

During business hours Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–5 p.m.

After hours, weekends, or holidays

Call 801-587-7000. Ask for the oncology fellow on call.