



## **EMPYEMA**

### **What is empyema?**

Empyema is a chest infection, best described as a pocket of pus in the cavity between the lung and the membrane or fine tissue that surrounds it (pleural space).

### **What causes empyema?**

Empyema is caused by infection that spreads from the lung and leads to a build-up of pus in the pleural spaces. In children, empyema is most often caused by pneumonia.

### **What are the symptoms of empyema?**

Your child will show signs and symptoms of lung infections or pneumonias. These could include fevers, chills, cough, shortness of breath, or night sweats. The infection will cause pus and fluid to collect and form “effusions,” or areas of infection in the lung. Thicker gel-like substances in and around your child’s lungs may form and may need to be removed.

### **How is empyema treated?**

Your child will probably be treated initially with intravenous (IV) antibiotics or other special medicines to treat the infections. Your child could also possibly have a chest tube placed to drain the infection off of your child’s lungs. Your child’s doctors may decide that he or she needs surgery to remove the infection in your child’s lungs.

### **What can I expect if my child has to have the VATS procedure?**

If your child’s doctors decide that your child needs the VATS (video assisted thoroscopic surgery) procedure to remove the pockets of infection from the lung tissue and spaces, your child will be taken to the operating room and given anesthesia so that he or she will be asleep for the surgery.

The surgeon will operate through 2 to 4 tiny openings between the ribs. They will remove the diseased lung tissue or fluids and leave the healthy lung tissue in place; this procedure will decrease the amount of infection in the lungs and help your child breathe better.

### **What can I expect after my child has the VATS procedure?**

Your child will have a chest tube put in after the VATS procedure that will help drain the fluid that was not drained in surgery. Your doctors will continue to examine your child and may order X-rays after the surgery to check your child's lungs to make sure the infection is decreasing. Your child will probably continue on IV medicines to treat the infection. The chest tube will be removed by the surgery team when the chest x-ray shows your child's lung is healing

### **What care is needed at home after surgery?**

*Activity:* Your child may eat and drink as usual. Your child may return to school in 3-4 days after discharge, if you need a school excuse please let us know. No P.E., sports, bicycle riding or lifting more than 20 pounds until your child is seen for the postoperative check-up or postoperative phone call.

*Medications:* You will be given a prescription for pain medicine, if needed, or you may give your child Acetaminophen (Tylenol) or Ibuprofen (Motrin) for pain. If this does not relieve the pain call our office.

*Care of the incision:* The incision is covered by a bandage(steri-strips) or surgical glue. The stitches are under the skin and will not have to be removed. They will dissolve (melt) in 6-8weeks. If the steri-strips have not fallen off in 5-7 days, you may remove them.

If your child had a chest tube, remove the dressing in 24 hours. Wash the site once a day with soap and water. The site may have yellow to clear drainage for several days as it heals. If there is drainage, cover the site with a band-aid. Once there is no drainage from the site, you may leave it uncovered.

*Bathing:* 2-3 days after surgery, your child may shower or have a shallow bath. Pat the incision dry if it gets wet. 7 days after surgery, your child may bathe as usual.

### **When should my child return to surgery clinic?**

Your child's follow-up appointment will be in 2-4 weeks. You will be given your appointment when discharged or it will be mailed to you. A chest x-ray may be obtained at this appointment.

\*\*\*\*\*

If you have any questions or problems, please call

Monday-Friday 8am – 4:30pm 501-364-4852 Surgery Specialty Nurses

After hours and weekends 501-364-1100 Ask for Surgeon On Call

\*\*\*\*\*

10/14/08 Pediatric Surgery Specialty Nurses and Nurse Practitioner

Adapted from [www.apsna.org](http://www.apsna.org)