Thoracentesis
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Fluid can collect in the space between the lining on the outside of the lungs (pleura) and the chest wall. Normally, very little fluid is in this space. A variety of conditions (such as infection, heart failure, or cancer) can cause fluid to collect in the pleural space. A buildup of extra fluid between the layers of the pleura is called a pleural effusion. A large amount of fluid may make it difficult to breathe. During a thoracentesis, a needle is carefully inserted (put in) to take out fluid or air from the pleural space. This procedure is also called a pleural tap.

Why is a thoracentesis done?

- To find out why the extra fluid collected in the pleural space.
- To help the symptoms (such as shortness of breath) caused by the extra fluid in this space that is compressing (pressing on) the lung.
What happens before a thoracentesis?
• There is no special preparation for this test.
• **Make sure your doctor knows if you are taking blood thinners or have a bleeding disorder.**

Where is the procedure done?
The procedure is done in the Respiratory Clinic or on an inpatient nursing unit. The Clinic is on level 4, in the Halifax Infirmary, near the Robie Street entrance.

How is a thoracentesis done?
• You will be in a sitting position.
• The doctor will look at your chest closely to find the best area to insert the needle.
• A large area on your back is washed with a cleaning solution.
• A medication to numb a smaller area of your back is injected into the skin. There will be a stinging feeling when the “freezing” is injected.
• The thoracentesis needle is then placed through the skin of the chest wall between the ribs into the space around the lungs called the pleural space. You may feel a little pressure when the needle is inserted into the pleural space.
• **Try not to cough, breathe deeply, or move during the test as this may cause injury to the lung.**
• Fluid is taken out using a syringe or a vacuum bottle. The needle is taken out and a Band-Aid® will cover the insertion spot.
• The fluid will be sent to the laboratory for tests.
What happens after a thoracentesis?

- A chest X-ray may be done after the procedure to find any possible complications.
- You may go home about 30 minutes after the test.

Call your doctor or go to the nearest Emergency Department if you:

- Cough up blood.
- Have difficulty breathing.
- Have chest pain.

If you have any questions, please ask.
We are here to help you.