

Pleural Effusion

What is Pleural Effusion?

Pleural effusion is an abnormal accumulation of fluid in the chest cavity. As the fluid increases, it can limit the development of the lungs and compromise the heart's function. Causes of pleural effusion may include chromosome abnormalities, heart conditions, lung problems, or abnormal lymph drainage. Many times, however, the cause is unknown.

If your baby has been diagnosed with this condition, you can rely on the experts at the SSM Health Cardinal Glennon St. Louis Fetal Care Institute to monitor you and your child's health throughout your pregnancy and provide the best possible treatment. Our team works collaboratively with experts across our network to provide infants complete, timely care. This includes access to our NICU (Neonatal Intensive Care Unit), where we can assist babies with their breathing, and long-term follow-up care as their lungs continue to heal and develop.

How Is a Pleural Effusion Diagnosed?

Pleural effusions are typically detected during a routine prenatal ultrasound, where the abnormal fluid collection can be seen in a baby's chest. From here, our team is able to monitor and evaluate the severity of the fluid collection to determine if your baby is in any danger. In addition to regular ultrasounds, we also perform a fetal echocardiogram (echo), an ultrasound to understand how your child's heart is functioning. We may also obtain a sample of your amniotic fluid through amniocentesis to look for any chromosomal abnormalities.

How is a Pleural Effusion Treated?

Most cases of pleural effusion do not require fetal treatment, and in some situations, the fluid may spontaneously disappear.

If the fluid is causing severe problems with the development of the heart or lungs, a fetal intervention to drain the fluid may be performed. The team at the Cardinal Glennon St. Louis Fetal Care Institute can insert a small needle through the mother's uterus into the fetal lung to drain the fluid. A thoracoamniotic shunt, a small tube, may be placed to help drain fluid from the chest cavity. During the fetal surgery, one end of the tube is placed in the chest cavity, while the other end protrudes into the amniotic cavity. By removing the fluid, the lungs and the heart have room to develop.

Even with fetal intervention, you will typically be able to deliver your child vaginally. At the Cardinal Glennon St. Louis Fetal Care Institute, you can rest assured that your baby will be delivered in a hospital that is prepared to handle your needs. Our NICU is specifically equipped to assist your child's breathing and respond to complex medical situations after birth.

A Cardinal Glennon St. Louis Fetal Care Institute nurse is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to discuss referrals with physicians and potential families by calling 314-268-4037, option 2.

Phone 314-268-4037, option 2
Toll-free 1-877-SSM-FETL (776-3385)
Web stlouisfetalcare.com
Email fetalcare@ssmhealth.com
Facebook facebook.com/fetaldocs

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What Can I Expect if My Baby is Born with a Pleural Effusion?

Immediately after delivery, our doctors will evaluate your baby and begin treatment as necessary to drain the excess fluid. Your baby will be stabilized in the NICU to fully assess their heart and lung function. A sample of fluid will also be obtained to help determine the cause of the pleural effusion.

Most cases of this condition are mild, and children continue to grow with normal lung function. In other cases, more extensive surgical treatments may be required to repair the underlying cause or to repair damage to the lungs. Our team at the Cardinal Glennon St. Louis Fetal Care Institute is uniquely equipped to manage your child's medical situation and develop a complete care plan before, during, and after your child is born.

While we can't change the diagnosis, we can provide you expert care and support, helping your child get the most out of treatment and life. If you're facing a diagnosis, schedule an appointment with us at the Cardinal Glennon St. Louis Fetal Care Institute. You may call our team directly at 314-268-4037 or speak with your doctor about the potential of a referral.
