



## **THORACOTOMY**

### **What is a thoracotomy?**

A thoracotomy is a surgical incision into the chest. It is done when the surgeon needs to operate on the lung or remove a mass near the lung. In your child's case, it is being done to remove a lung abnormality that he/she was born with.

### **How are congenital lung formations diagnosed?**

Congenital lung malformations are usually diagnosed with a chest x-ray or CT scan. In some cases, the child may have problems breathing.

### **How is the decision made that surgery is needed?**

The decision for surgery is made between you and your surgeon. Some children have difficulty breathing because of their congenital lung malformation. Others may develop infections. There is also concern that the malformation may become cancerous.

### **What can I expect from surgery?**

Your child will have an incision between the ribs on the side where the malformation is located. In some cases, this can be done with tiny incisions and telescope-like instruments (thoracoscopy). In other cases, there will be a larger incision. The size and position of the malformation will determine which type of surgery your child has. After surgery, your child will have a chest tube to reinflate his/her lung. This tube will be connected to a container which drains fluid and air from the chest. It will stay in place several days.

### **What should I bring with me on the day of the surgery?**

On the day of the operation, you might want to bring a favorite toy or blanket. You do not need to bring medications, diapers or food. They will all be provided by the hospital.

### **When will my child be able to go home?**

Your child should be ready for discharge 2-3 days after surgery. He/she should be eating and drinking and should be comfortable on oral pain medication in order to be ready to go home.

### **How much time should I plan off work?**

You might want to plan to be off of work for 7-10 days to allow enough time for the operation and your child's recovery time at home.

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

*Pain management*--Your child will need some pain medication at home. Once he/she starts to feel better during the day, you may still wish to give something before bed to assure a good nights sleep.

*Feeding*--Your child may eat anything he/she wishes. If still taking pain medicine with a narcotic in it, be aware that narcotics cause constipation. Encourage your child to drink plenty of fluids to help prevent constipation.

*Activity*--Your child will not be allowed to participate in strenuous physical activities or contact sports for 4-6 weeks.

*Bathing*--Bathing is fine four days after the operation. It is not necessary to protect the incision with plastic. However, the bath should be short and showers are preferred if your child is old enough.

**When should I call the surgery team?**

Call the surgery team for fever, redness or swelling, or new tenderness or drainage near the incision or chest tube site. The incision will be pink at first and some soreness is normal.

**When can my child return to school or daycare?**

Your child will need to be home from daycare for 7-10 days. School age children will not be able to participate in physical education or be on the playground for 4-6 weeks. They also should not carry a heavy backpack. He/she will need a note from the surgery team to return to school and a second note to return to gym.

**Will this affect growth and development?**

This operation should not affect your child's growth and development or present any long term problems.

Please reproduce and distribute this sheet to your surgery families. This teaching sheet can also be downloaded at [www.APSNA.org](http://www.APSNA.org).

Copyright 2006, *Teri Cocha*. Copied with permission by Jones and Bartlett Publishers, Sudbury, MA.