

## Information for Parents

# Chest Drains

### What is a chest drain?

A chest drain is a piece of plastic tubing. One end is placed in the space around your baby's lungs and the other end is attached to a vacuum seal. Air or fluid can then be drained away.

### Which babies need a chest drain?

Some babies, especially those who are premature and on a ventilator (breathing machine), can develop a 'pneumothorax'. This is when air leaks into the space surrounding the lungs causing the lungs to collapse. This needs urgent treatment with a chest drain so that the lung can be re-inflated.

A 'pleural effusion' is when fluid collects in the space surrounding the lungs. This fluid can make it difficult for the lungs to work properly. It is sometimes necessary to remove this fluid using a chest drain.

### How is the chest drain inserted?

The drain will normally be inserted into the side of your baby's chest.

First the baby's chest is cleaned. Local anaesthetic may be injected into the skin overlying one of the spaces between baby's ribs.

A small opening or cut is made in the skin. The chest drain is then pushed through the opening and connected as described above. A dressing (and sometimes a stitch) is used to keep it in place.

### Is it safe?

**Yes**, but there can be some problems:

- The tube may need to be moved to ensure that it continues to drain properly.

- There is a small risk of infection in either the overlying skin or in the space surrounding the lungs.
- Very rarely, it is possible for the nerve that goes to the diaphragm (a chest muscle that helps with breathing) to be damaged.
- Extremely rarely, especially in very small babies, it is possible for a chest drain to enter the heart during insertion.

When the drain is removed the hole is closed with paper (butterfly) stitches.

After the skin has healed there will be a small scar.

## How long will it stay in?

After the drain has been inserted a chest X-ray will be done to make sure that it is working properly.

The length of time that a drain needs to stay in for is different for every baby. The medical and nursing teams looking after your baby will be able to advise you on how long your baby may need their drain for.

Sometimes fluid collections (pleural effusion) can persist for some time and in these cases chest drains may remain in the chest until the problem resolves.

## Will I be informed before a chest drain is inserted?

Air can leak into the space surrounding the lungs very quickly and it needs to be drained urgently if it occurs.

Although you will, of course, be informed as soon as possible, insertion of a chest drain is an emergency lifesaving procedure.

It is therefore important that the drain is inserted as soon as the problems are diagnosed.

This may mean that the drain has to be inserted before there has been an opportunity to inform you.

## Who do I ask for more information?

Please ask to speak to one of the nurses or doctors if you have any further questions.