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Authors
Schlesinger, Shira A
Perera, Philips

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Tuberculous Pleural Effusion

Shira A. Schlesinger, MD, MPH
Philips Perera, MD
Los Angeles County + USC Medical Center, Department of Emergency Medicine, Los Angeles, California

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Chest radiograph detected a left pleural effusion in a 33-year-old male with no previous medical history. On examination, decreased breath sounds at the left lung base and intermittent nonproductive cough were noted. Bedside emergency department (ED) ultrasound revealed pleural thickening adjoining a complex pleural effusion with multiple thin septations. The patient was placed in respiratory isolation and admitted for tuberculosis treatment following acid-fast bacilli positive sputums.

DISCUSSION

Approximately 13,000 cases of tuberculosis are reported in the United States each year. ED physicians are likely to have primary contact with these individuals. The ultrasound appearance of a tuberculous pleural effusion has demonstrated high specificity for tuberculosis and can assist in appropriate allocation of ED resources and rapid isolation from the general public. With the growing availability of bedside ultrasound, knowledge of this common appearance can assist providers in rapidly stratifying and advancing care of otherwise challenging patients.
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REFERENCES