**Case Report**

A Baffling Bump: A Case Report of an Unusual Chest Wall Mass in a Pediatric Patient

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Section Editor: Melanie Heniff, MD
Submission history: Submitted January 28, 2021; Revision received April 8, 2021; Accepted March 15, 2021
Electronically published July 27, 2021
Full text available through open access at http://escholarship.org/uc/uciem_cpcem
DOI: 10.5811/cpcem.2021.3.51958

**Introduction:** Chest wall masses are rare in children, but the differential diagnosis is broad and can include traumatic injury, neoplasm, and inflammatory or infectious causes. We report a novel case of an eight-year-old, previously healthy female who presented to the emergency department (ED) with one month of cough, fevers, weight loss, and an anterior chest wall mass.

**Case Report:** The patient’s ultimate diagnosis was necrotizing pneumonia with pneumatocele extending into the chest wall. This case is notable for the severity of the patient’s pulmonary disease given its extension through the chest wall, and for the unique speciation of her infection.

**Conclusion:** Although necrotizing pneumonia is a rare complication of community-acquired pneumonia, it is important for the emergency physician to recognize it promptly as it indicates severe progression of pulmonary disease even in children with normal and stable vital signs, as in this case. The emergency physician should consider complications of pneumonia including pneumatocele and empyema necessitans when presented with an anterior chest wall mass in a pediatric patient. Additionally, point-of-care ultrasound was used in the ED to facilitate the diagnosis of this illness and was particularly useful in determining the continuity of the patient’s lung infection with her extrathoracic chest wall mass. [Clin Pract Cases Emerg Med. 2021;X(X):XXX–XXX.]

**Keywords:** Necrotizing pneumonia; empyema necessitans; infectious disease; ultrasound; pediatric; case report.

**INTRODUCTION**

The emergency physician must consider a wide differential diagnosis for a pediatric patient with an acquired chest wall mass. An incomplete list of some of the most common etiologies includes trauma, neoplasm (most commonly lymphoma, germ cell or neurogenic tumors, sarcoma, lipoma), and inflammatory or infectious causes (abscess, granuloma, osteomyelitis, cellulitis). We present a case of an anterior chest wall mass in an eight-year-old, previously healthy female patient that was ultimately determined to be an extrathoracic extension of a necrotizing pneumonia of the right lung. We found no other reports in the literature describing a previously healthy pediatric patient with a chest wall mass arising from a necrotizing pneumonia communicating through the chest wall. We present this case to encourage the consideration of necrotizing pneumonia in a pediatric patient with a chest wall mass.

**CASE REPORT**

An eight-year-old, previously healthy female presented to the emergency department (ED) with one month of weight loss, fatigue, dry cough, and low-grade fevers. She had been seen one month prior to presentation for cough and fatigue at a clinic and was given return precautions for a presumed viral upper respiratory infection. Over the course of the subsequent month, her symptoms worsened to include weight loss, fatigue, and persistent low-grade fevers. She presented again to the clinic and was found to have labs significant for hemoglobin of 6.5 grams.
Necrotizing pneumonia is a rare but serious complication of community-acquired pneumonia in children.

We found no previously reported cases of necrotizing pneumonia in a pediatric patient that progressed through the chest wall to an extrathoracic pneumatocele.

Community-acquired pneumonia can progress to necrotizing pneumonia and pleural infections involving the chest wall.

Emergency physicians should consider advanced complications of pneumonia when presented with an acquired chest wall mass in a pediatric patient.
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Fusobacterium nucleatum, and Streptococcus viridans. The patient completed a course of vancomycin and ampicillin and sulbactam before transitioning to amoxicillin clavulanate for three weeks of total antibiotic therapy. Pleural fluid cultures and imaging studies were as described previously. The patient intermittently required up to 10 L of high-flow nasal cannula during her PICU stay and elevated head of bed due to desaturations with activity. She was moved from the PICU on hospital day six to the floor on room air and was discharged to home after 19 total days hospitalized with a Heimlich valve in place with regular dressing changes and follow-up.

DISCUSSION

Necrotizing pneumonia is a severe complication of community-acquired pneumonia (CAP) in children. It is characterized by a progressive bacterial pneumonia, often in a previously healthy and young (commonly less than five years of age) host. Although it is relatively uncommon and occurs in less than 4% of children with CAP by some estimates, serious complications such as septic shock, respiratory failure, pyopneumothorax, and empyema have been reported. The most common pathogens are Streptococcus pneumoniae and Staphylococcus aureus. Computed tomography (CT) is the most sensitive diagnostic tool, with blood and pleural fluid cultures supporting speciation. The mechanism underlying the progression of bacterial pneumonia to necrotizing pneumonia is poorly understood but likely relates to both host susceptibility and bacterial virulence factors. Necrotizing pneumonia is often resistant to adequate antibiotic therapy and may require surgical treatment or drainage of pleural fluid and gas that cause mass effect in the chest. Despite its severity, long-term sequelae and death are uncommon, and patients typically achieve recovery 5-6 months following diagnosis.

In contrast, empyema necessitans is a rare complication of pleural space infections and occurs when the infected fluid dissects from the pleural space spontaneously into the chest wall. These cases most often result from inadequate treatment of an empyema but can occur after a necrotizing pneumonia or pulmonary abscess. Actinomyces and S pneumoniae are the most common pathogens, and less typically can include S aureus, Streptococcus milleri, Fusobacterium nucleatum, Mycobacterium avium, Mycobacterium intracellulare, Burkholderia cepacia, and Nocardia asteroides.

This case is noteworthy because the patient had microbiologic features of both necrotizing pneumonia as well as a pleural infection arising from several different bacterial species. Her pleural viridans streptococci and Fusobacterium were likely oral flora originating from her poor dentition and are more characteristic of a pleural infection. The extrathoracic fluid collection was initially postulated to be empyema necessitans arising from this pleural infection; however, subsequent imaging evidenced that her disease process was more consistent with a necrotizing right upper lobe pneumonia with a pneumatocele extending through the chest wall. Her imaging did not show enhancing thickened pleura or split pleural sign that would suggest empyema extending to empyema necessitans.

Secondly, we propose that POCUS was a key diagnostic component in the initial ED workup. This imaging modality demonstrated complex avascular heterogeneous hypoechoic fluid with scattered echogenic air artifact both in the patient’s lung and small anterior chest wall collection. The movement of the substance visible on POCUS suggested that the contents of the patient’s lung infection communicated with the extrathoracic fluid collection, a finding that was later corroborated by CT of the chest.
CONCLUSION

We present a case of necrotizing pneumonia that is unique for its microbiologic profile as well as its severity and extension through the patient’s chest wall. Point-of-care ultrasound in the ED facilitated visualization of the communication between the patient’s pulmonary infection and the anterior chest mass, which was a key component in diagnosis of necrotizing pneumonia extending to the chest wall. Emergency physicians should consider necrotizing pneumonia in patients with persistent cough, fevers, fatigue, and weight loss and should consider extension of a pulmonary infection when presented with an acquired chest wall mass in a pediatric patient.

The authors attest that their institution requires neither Institutional Review Board approval, nor patient consent for publication of this case report. Documentation on file.

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