Where are the lungs? An unusual mediastinal mass

A 2-year-old boy was referred to our department for gradual onset of breathlessness over 2 months. Physical examination revealed tachypnoea and bilaterally reduced breath sounds. Chest x-ray showed opacification of both lung fields (figure 1), and chest CT scan revealed a huge mediastinal mass originating from the thymus (15.2 × 11.2 × 8.8 cm) filling the whole thoracic cavity (figure 2). An uneventful percutaneous biopsy excluded lymphoma; the mass was subsequently resected and found to be a type B1 thymoma. The child has been followed up without recurrence for 3 months.

Thymoma is exceedingly uncommon in children and young adults. Type A has neoplastic epithelial cells with oval/spindle-shaped nuclei and in type B the cells have a predominantly round/polygonal appearance. Type B thymoma is further subdivided on the basis of the atypia of the neoplastic epithelial cells into subtypes B1, B2 and B3. Thymic carcinoma is type C.

In summary, thymomas represent less than 1% of all mediastinal tumours in children but should be considered in the differential diagnosis of mediastinal masses because of their invasive potential, parathymic syndromes and the association with other malignancies.

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