Serena Williams' Pulmonary Embolism
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Published March 02, 2011 | FoxNews.com

Tennis star Serena Williams underwent "emergency treatment" after doctors discovered a blood clot in her lungs, People magazine reported.

Spokeswoman Nicole Chabot told the magazine that Williams "underwent emergency treatment for a hematoma suffered as a result of treatment for a more critical situation." Chabot also told the magazine the embolism was discovered after Williams returned to Los Angeles from New York "for doctor appointments for the ongoing issues with her foot."

News that a top athlete like Serena Williams suffered a pulmonary embolism last week has many people wondering how this could happen to someone who stays fit for a living.

Well, the truth is, deep vein thrombosis can happen to anyone. And since Williams had just undergone surgery, her risk was increased.

Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) leading to a pulmonary embolism can occur at any age. Of course there are risk factors like clotting disorders, taking birth control pills, prolonged immobility, smoking, family history and being overweight.

Surgery is actually one of the leading causes of problem blood clots because it is possible for tissue debris to enter the bloodstream and form a clot. Since Williams had surgery on her foot, it's fair to assume that she was ordered by her doctors to stay off it and remain immobile. Add to that, she was flying back and forth on a plane, and her risk just increased even more.

Sometimes, having an extremity in a cast can aid in the formation of blood clots in the legs that can travel to the lungs and cause pulmonary embolism, where one or more of the arteries in the lungs becomes blocked.

This can be very dangerous because it can stop oxygenation of the blood and left untreated, can cause death. But with emergency attention, and treatment with anti-clotting medication, the outcomes are often good.

Symptoms may start with tenderness in the calf if the clot originates in the leg, but by the time it travels to the lungs and becomes a pulmonary embolism, a patient may experience shortness of breath, chest pain or palpitations and wheezing.

I'm glad Williams' doctors are monitoring her condition, and I wish her a speedy recovery.

*The Associated Press contributed to this report.*