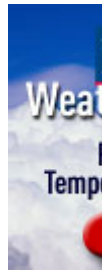


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Severe Thunderstorm Warning has been issued for Dunn County until 8

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## Child in Critical Condition after Being Mauled



[Watch Video on Windows Media](#)

Ten-year-old Russell Lala of rural Royalton, north of St. Cloud, is hospitalized at HCMC in critical condition after being attacked by a tiger.

Russell and his father were at a friend's home Wednesday night being shown the man's collection of a dozen exotic lions, tigers and a bear when a tiger suddenly sprang from an open cage door and attacked the boy.

After the boy was bitten by the tiger, a lion joined in the mauling. Eventually the boy's father and friend got the animals off him and returned them to their cages.

The boy was first taken to St. Gabriel's Hospital in Little Falls but because of the seriousness of his wounds was transferred to HCMC.

Morrison County Sheriff Michel Wetzel said while the owner of the facility is in compliance with state statutes covering exotic animals, he doesn't like the situation.

"We have had one other incident where a person was bitten down there." Wetzel says in that case, it was also a friend of the owner and they chose not to do anything.

"I don't like the potential of having these big cats in this county. If something happens and a cage is open, even if the owner had no control over it, we've got a big problem and I don't like it," says Wetzel.

Several neighbors are also concerned. They say there's a constant fear that one of the animals will escape and cause all kinds of problems. Cindy Poppen lives down a dirt road from the animal compound, which is also a junkyard and auto body repair shop. She says she's limited her daughter's activities because of the animals. "(She) used to be able to go over there bike riding...I won't let her out there now and we keep really close watch on our dogs. We have Chihuahuas and terriers and they'd be perfect bait."

Owner Chuck Mock released a one sentence statement saying 'We are with the family at the hospital and their only concern is the well being of the child.'

Thursday afternoon Mock authorized Sheriff Wetzel to killed the two animals involved in the attack. Lab tests are now being done to see if either was infected with any disease, including rabies.

A fund for the family of Russell Lala has been established at:

The Pine Country Bank  
412 HWY 10 North,  
Royalton MN 56373.  
Phone number is 320-584-5522.

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Last Updated: 6/23/2005 10:23:58 PM



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