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Son bitten by neighbor's dog; family wants answers

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Three days after a dog bit her 7-year-old son hard enough to break his skin, Kim Foley was still waiting to hear from animal control officers and doesn't know what's become of the dog.

That's a problem, because nobody seems to know whether the dog had its shots -- especially its rabies shot.

"I'm frustrated," Foley said Wednesday. "I don't know where the dog is, and nobody has contacted us to tell us what's going on. Not only that, we heard this was the second time the dog has attacked a child."

The attack was early Sunday afternoon outside a home in the 500 block of North 24th Avenue in Yakima.

Foley's son, Ethan, was playing in the yard with his younger brother and a cousin when the dog, described as a boxer mix, bit Ethan several times on the buttocks.

"We were getting ready to leave when this dog came out of nowhere and attacked him," the boy's father, Sam Westergard, said. "I ran over and grabbed the leash -- he had a leash trailing behind him -- and dragged him over next door and said, 'Your dog attacked my kid.' They said, 'Oh, no. We're really sorry.'"

Westergard took his son to Yakima Valley Memorial Hospital, where he was treated for several bite wounds, including a deep puncture that was badly lacerated and required a stitch.

While a doctor treated Ethan, a Yakima police officer took a report and a nurse snapped photographs of the wounds.

"The officer (jokingly) said, 'I'm going to talk to the dog now and hear the dog's side of the story,'" recalled Foley, who met the boy and his father at the hospital.

Diane Seymour, one of the city's three animal control officers, confirmed late Wednesday that her office received a report from the police department the day after the attack.

With everybody off for Christmas, she said the report was referred to another animal control officer earlier on Wednesday. That officer did not return a call to his cell phone.

Westergard, meanwhile, said he's spoken again to the owners of the dog. "They said they got rid of it," he said. "I don't know if they gave it to a friend or if they took it to the pound or put it down themselves. They didn't specify what they meant."

According to the Yakima Health District Web site, the standard procedure when a dog bites is to quarantine the animal for 10 days to watch for signs of rabies.

"If the animal were not quarantined and developed rabies, we may not diagnose the rabies soon enough to get the victim medical care," according to the web site. "Once rabies symptoms develop in humans, the disease is fatal."

The last case of rabies found in dogs in Washington state was in 1977. Bats are the main carriers -- one in 10 have the virus.

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