

Boy expected to survive dog attack

Quarantined bull terrier will be put to death

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A 3-year-old Hastings boy who was mauled by the same dog he often played with in his grandparents' backyard is expected to survive the attack.

Doctors at Shands Jacksonville are working to repair what they can of the child's seriously damaged face, ear and neck tissue.

The child's ears were almost completely bitten off during the Sunday afternoon attack, said St. Johns County Animal Control Supervisor Paul Studivant.

The grandparents were hosting a barbecue at their Hastings home when the child wandered into their backyard. That's where the family's two bull terriers, a male and a female, were tied up.

Studivant said the grandmother went looking for the child after she found only his toys and shoes where she had last seen him playing.

She heard a noise coming from the backyard and walked around the corner to find her injured grandchild lying on the ground next to the male dog, which was also lying down.

The child, whose name was withheld because he of his age, was taken to the hospital by helicopter so doctors could immediately attend to the damage to his head.

The family was baffled by the attack because the child had grown up with the dogs and played with them "all the time" without incident until Sunday's attack, St. Johns County Sheriff's spokesman Sgt. Chuck Mulligan said.

Animal Control's Studivant speculated something must have set the dog off by accident, such as food aggression, protectiveness of the other dog or playing that got too rough.

"Nobody really knows what happened because nobody saw it happen," he said.

The grandparents voluntarily turned the dog over to Animal Control, which will monitor it for 10 days to ensure it doesn't have any diseases, such as rabies.

Then the dog will be put to death.

Studivant said the dog was perfectly friendly when an Animal Control officer took it into custody on Sunday.

In his 13 years with animal control, Studivant said, he had not dealt with bull terriers until the past two weeks.

First, there was the dog involved in Sunday's attack at the south end of the county.

A second bull terrier was found wandering in Fruit Cove on the north end of the county. The second bull terrier has shown no signs of aggression, he said.

The breed became well-known in the late 1980s after Bud Light beer used a bull terrier named Spuds MacKenzie in its marketing campaign.

Bull terriers were originally bred as fighting dogs, according to the American Kennel Club.

But Mulligan said stereotypes aren't always the way to predict how a dog will behave. Instead, he advises that people "know your dog and look for those overall signs, look at how they grew up and the behavior they exhibit."

He also encouraged people to "be aware" whenever a child is near a dog.

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