

2 people, dog hurt in attack at dog park

The attack marked the first time since the Newport News park opened in April that a person was bitten, an official said.

BY SHAWN DAY

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NEWPORT NEWS -- A dog attack this week at the city's only off-leash park left a miniature dachshund with serious injuries and two women with bite wounds.

Christine Hyatt and her daughter, Kathy, were walking their three small dogs through Fido Field, an off-leash dog park at Riverview Farm Park, Tuesday when they heard someone holler.

Hyatt, 67, spun around and saw an Akita mix sink its teeth into the neck of her 2-year-old dachshund, Maddy, and start shaking.

Maddy broke free, but the dog attacked again.

Christine Hyatt and her daughter tried to intervene, and the Akita mangled Christine Hyatt's middle finger and bit her daughter's hand, Hyatt said.

Eventually, she said, the Akita's owner helped pull the dog off.

Hyatt's dog remained in an animal hospital Thursday, but a doctor said Maddy could be released this weekend, Hyatt said.

Hyatt, meanwhile, underwent treatment for her sliced and fractured finger at an emergency medical clinic.

She worried about the risk of rabies, since she didn't know whether the Akita had been vaccinated.

On Thursday, as she sat at the intersection of Menchville Road and Warwick Boulevard, Hyatt said, she saw the Akita's owner drive past.

It was "divine intervention," she said.

She and her daughter followed him to a Bryan Court home, where she confronted the driver, according to a city animal services report.

The driver, James Coleman, admitted owning the Akita, Hyatt said.

She's hoping Coleman will cover her dog's medical bills.

Coleman couldn't be reached for comment Thursday, but Bill Wise, the city's animal services superintendent, said Coleman reported his dog, "Kita," was registered and up-to-date on its shots.

The incident marked the first substantiated report of a person being bitten at the park since it opened in April 2006, said Andy Lunsford, the city's parks operations superintendent.

At Fido Field on Thursday, Josh Biskey, 27, watched his German shepherd, Dakota, roll through the dirt with a mixed terrier.

He described the park as a great place for both dog owners and dogs to socialize.

Most people, he said, recognize when their pets become aggressive.

"You have to step in before something happens," Biskey said. "You need to know what your dog's capable of."

Properly training a dog is crucial to helping it get along with others at places such as an off-leash park, Biskey said.

He often walked Dakota through PetSmart to help socialize the dog, and he also has a miniature pinscher that plays with Dakota, he said.

Leonard Schneider, 63, of Newport News, said that his daughter's miniature pinscher, Rusty, was bitten by a pit bull at the park in November.

He said the dog now often clings to his leg during their daily outing there.

"The dogs really are social," Schneider said, as Rusty sniffed the ground a few feet away.

"They like each other. Once in a while you get a dog that's not sociable."

When he sees an aggressive dog, Schneider said he takes Rusty to a one-eighth-acre, fenced area that's adjacent to Fido Field's main off-leash area.

Christine Hyatt doesn't plan to do that.

Her visit to Fido Field on Tuesday was her first and last, she said.

"I'm not taking my dogs out of the yard anymore."