

The County Press

Boy mauled in dog attack

Unusual spike in dog bites reported; many not vaccinated

By SUSAN YOUNGER
Staff Reporter

DEERFIELD TWP -- A local boy was severely mauled Friday evening by a normally friendly St. Bernard dog.

Mikiah Jaros-Starr 11, who lives on Five Lakes Road, was so brutally attacked that he required a blood transfusion and five hours of surgery to his scalp wounds. The Lynch Elementary School student is hospitalized at Hurley Medical Center in Flint.

"No one knows what triggered the dog to bite him," said Lapeer County Animal Control Chief Walt Rodabaugh. "He was just walking by and it pounced on him. It took two people to get the dog off the child."

The owners of "Brittany," who are neighbors and friends of the Jaros-Starr family, told Rodabaugh their dog has never been aggressive and is known to love children.

"He feels really bad about it. He's beside himself about what happened," Rodabaugh said.

Christina Jaros-Starr, Mikiah's mother, is stunned by the unprovoked aggression.

"Brit is a wonderful, dog," said Christina. "We never had any reason to think otherwise. My kids played with her; she had just licked my other son's face. My neighbors had no reason to think she would do this. It was a horrible accident and not anyone's fault. It happened right after the storms."

Brittany, who has never been vaccinated for rabies, has been euthanized so Rodabaugh could test for the disease, caused by contact with the saliva of an infected animal. Results weren't available at press time.

Unprovoked attacks from dogs who haven't been vaccinated for rabies are on the rise in the county. That's almost a death sentence for dogs who bite a human. Animals must be killed to perform the test.

"Over the weekend, we had nine bites by dogs," Rodabaugh said. "With the heat and humidity, the bites aren't unusual. Dogs react to it. What is new is that so many of the dogs have no history of shots. I euthanized six dogs today and none are strays. It doesn't make me happy and it doesn't make the owners happy. They're going to Lansing to test for rabies."

With no available shot history, stray dogs who bite humans are held for four days at the shelter by law. If no one claims them, they're destroyed, and the rabies test is performed. If a pet bites a human, the dog must be surrendered to animal control.

Compounding another problem, there is a temporary shortage of vaccine that's administered to animal handlers.

"It's a prebite vaccine, used by veterinarians and animal control officers who are at risk of being bit," said Lapeer County Public Health Department Director Stephanie Simmons. "We need to save it for exposures."

Rodabaugh is very concerned about the number of Lapeer County residents who likely aren't vaccinating their dogs. That means more people could be potentially exposed to the deadly disease.

"It may be because of the economy, but we're down 695 licenses from this same time last year," he said. "Right now we have 500 letters going out and animal control officers will be out on the road. If a dog is found without a license, the owner will be ticketed."

Meanwhile family, friends and neighbors are at the hospital bedside of Mikiah.

"He will recover," said Christina. "A lot of his wounds are cosmetic. He has a lot of healing to do, and a long way to go, but he will be okay."

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