

## PRESS RELEASE

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Editor note: Animal health and animal management staff are available for press interviews today by phone. For requests, please contact Farrah Paul: [farrah.paul@zoo.org](mailto:farrah.paul@zoo.org)

### **Zoo's baby gorilla injured during scuffle** ***Infant is recovering at hospital under 24-hour care***

SEATTLE—Woodland Park Zoo's 2½-month-old male gorilla, Kitoko (ki-TOE-koh), sustained injuries yesterday, May 23, during a skirmish among his six-member family group.



Zoo animal health staff immobilized Uzumma, the mother of Kitoko, in order to separate the baby and take him to the zoo's veterinary hospital for an examination, including diagnostic radiographs and a surgical repair of the wound.

"The infant sustained serious injuries to the head including a laceration from a bite wound, resulting in a bone fracture to the skull," said Dr. Darin Collins, director of animal health at Woodland Park Zoo. "What could have been a life-threatening injury to his head appears to be a serious wound that can heal if no complications from infection result."

The zoo was fortunate to have a team of pediatric neurosurgery consultants from Seattle Children's Hospital for their evaluation and to conduct the surgical exploration and closure of the wound. "Having the team from Seattle Children's Hospital on site was invaluable for their surgical expertise and advice regarding the longer term prognosis associated with this type of head injury," added Collins.

To minimize the risk of infection, the baby is receiving antibiotics and pain medications intravenously, and is recovering at the zoo's hospital under 24-hour care.

"We are cautiously optimistic for a full recovery and hope to return Kitoko to his mom today," said Collins. "Over the next two weeks, we will maintain a close assessment for any signs of infection or bleeding resulting in neurological deficits."

The gorilla keepers didn't witness the altercation among the gorillas, but cam footage shows it occurred at 7:50 a.m. in the sleeping den. The keepers noticed the wound at 8:00 a.m. The baby appeared to be nursing and behaving normally afterward.

Gorillas live in family groups of usually five to 10, and are led by a dominant adult male, the silverback. Kwame, the father of Kitoko, is the silverback of his group.

"Gorillas tend to be gentle giants but conflicts among family members do occur, in zoos and in nature," said Martin Ramirez, mammal curator at Woodland Park Zoo. "Conflicts can involve biting and shoving among individuals. We suspect one of the adult females may have inadvertently bitten the baby while engaged in a skirmish with Uzumma."

Uzumma and Kitoko, western lowland gorillas, live with Kitoko's dad, Kwame; female Nadiri and her daughter, Yola; and a female adult, Akenji.

After Uzumma was immobilized and her baby safely removed, animal care staff have kept her under close observation to ensure she safely recovered from anesthesia and to keep her comfortable without her baby.

"Uzumma is a first-time mother and has been an exceptionally good mom to her infant. She and Kitoko have maintained a close bond since he was born," said Ramirez. "Being separated from one another is a difficult time for both mom and baby. While Kitoko receives

round-the-clock care at the hospital, we have been monitoring Uzumma carefully and showering her with lots of extra TLC.”

According to Ramirez, it is important to maintain stability and normalcy among gorilla family groups. “Our priority is to reunite Uzumma and Kitoko as soon as possible. They’ll be temporarily separated from the other family members with one adult gorilla remaining with them, most likely Kwame,” said Ramirez.

While the zoo has been temporarily closed, the zoo has shared numerous updates on Uzumma and Kitoko. “Uzumma’s family spends most days in the public outdoor habitat and Kitoko has been thriving and reaching developmental milestones. During this time of social distancing, we have heard from our community that our gorillas and our other animals at the zoo continue to inspire hope and touch the hearts and minds of the community,” said Ramirez.

Gorilla fans can wish Kitoko well by signing his wish book:  
<https://www.zoo.org/growingupgorilla>.

The other gorillas living at the zoo is Kitoko’s grandmother, 50-year-old Amanda, who lives in the off-view bedrooms under geriatric care; and 41-year-old male Vip and 34-year-old female Jumoke who live together.

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