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Female tiger cub at Point Defiance Zoo in critical condition after undergoing surgery yesterday

Tacoma, Wash. – Mali, one of two endangered Sumatran tiger cubs at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, is in critical condition after undergoing surgery yesterday afternoon.

Zoo head veterinarian Dr. Karen Wolf called the prognosis for the five-month-old tiger “grim,” but said, “We haven’t given up hope and are continuing to monitor her around-the-clock and provide intensive treatment.”

Mali underwent surgery yesterday afternoon after keeper staff noticed that she was lethargic and looked uncomfortable. Zoo veterinarians examined her and found her stomach to be taut and distended. X-rays suggested a blockage somewhere in her gastrointestinal tract. Zoo veterinarian Dr. Holly Reed performed exploratory surgery. Zoo veterinarian Dr. Allison Case assisted, providing anesthesia.

Dr. Reed said Mali appeared to have eaten an extra large meal yesterday that included a bone for gnawing on. “We found several pieces of the bone that appeared to be blocking the lower end of her stomach, preventing it from passing food to her intestines,” she said. “No other areas of her intestine showed any evidence of blockage.” Bones are part of a normal meal.

Mali experienced post-surgical complications last night and went into cardiac arrest. She was resuscitated but zoo veterinarians believe she suffered some brain damage due to low oxygen and are aggressively treating her. Zoo veterinarians also are consulting with a local emergency veterinarian and neurologist about her case and treatment options.

“We’re very worried about Mali and are doing everything we possibly can to help her,” said Dr. Wolf.

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Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium promotes responsible stewardship of the world’s resources through education, conservation, research and recreational opportunities. The zoo, a division of Metro Parks Tacoma, is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums (AMMPA).