

6-day-old panda dies of pneumonia at Tokyo ZOO

July 11 2012, by MARI YAMAGUCHI



In this Saturday, July 7, 2012 file photo released by the Ueno Zoological Park Society, a newly born male panda baby is fed inside an incubator at Ueno Zoo in Tokyo. The zoo said the six-day old baby panda died of pneumonia Wednesday, July 11, 2012. When a zoo keeper checked it second time Wednesday morning as it was lying belly up on Shin Shin's chest, the baby was not breathing. (AP Photo/Ueno Zoological Park Society, File) EDITORIAL USE ONLY

(AP) — A baby giant panda died at a Tokyo zoo on Wednesday, less than a week after becoming the first to be born at the facility in 24 years. The birth had created excitement across Japan, and the nation was mourning the baby's death.

Tokyo's Ueno Zoo said the male panda, which had not been named yet, died of pneumonia Wednesday morning. A zookeeper found the baby,

who was born last Thursday, lying belly up and not breathing, on his 7-year-old mother's chest.

He was pronounced dead an hour later, after resuscitation efforts failed. It was 15 centimeters (6 inches) long and weighed only 125 grams (4.4 ounce).

In a news conference broadcast live, Yutaka Fukuda, the zoo's chief panda keeper, said milk had accidentally entered the baby's airway while his mother, Shin Shin, was breast-feeding. Traces of milk were found later in the baby's bronchial tube.



In this July 9, 2012 file photo released by the Ueno Zoological Park Society, Shin Shin, a 7-year-old giant panda, holds her newly born baby, center, in her cage at Ueno Zoo in Tokyo. The zoo said the six-day old baby panda died of pneumonia Wednesday, July 11, 2012. When a zoo keeper checked it second time Wednesday morning as it was lying belly up on Shin Shin's chest, the baby was not breathing. (AP Photo/Ueno Zoological Park Society, File) EDITORIAL USE ONLY

The baby panda had been kept in an incubator for three days before being sent back to Shin Shin on Tuesday.

"They peacefully spent the night and the baby was doing fine just this morning," Fukuda said, tears welling up in his eyes. "It happened so suddenly, and it's such a pity."

The panda was the first to be born at the zoo since 1988 and was conceived naturally. Giant pandas have a low birth rate, and artificial insemination is common in captive breeding programs.



In this Friday, July 6, 2012 photo released by the Ueno Zoological Park Society, a newly born male giant panda is cuddled by his mother Shin Shin in their cage at Ueno Zoo in Tokyo. The panda baby, who was born Thursday, July 5, 2012, died of pneumonia at the zoo on Wednesday, July 11, less than a week after becoming the first panda to be born at the facility in 24 years. (AP Photo/Ueno Zoological Park Society) EDITORIAL USE ONLY

His mother was brought from China just before Japan's tsunami and earthquake disasters last year. The much anticipated baby, the first born to Shin Shin, had been celebrated across Japan, and the news of his death topped afternoon television news Wednesday.

The zoo said it would set up a space for visitors to lay flowers and pray for the dead panda.

Less than half of newborn pandas survive more than a week, Fukuda said, citing Chinese panda experts. The rate is even worse for pandas born to first-time mothers, he said.

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