

US panda cub described as healthy and vibrant

August 25 2013, by Ben Nuckols



In this photo provided by the Smithsonian's National Zoo, a member of the panda team at the Smithsonian's National Zoo performs the first neonatal exam Sunday, Aug. 25, 2013, on a giant panda cub born Friday, Aug. 23, in Washington. The cub appeared to be in excellent health, zookeepers reported after a 10-minute physical exam Sunday morning. (AP Photo/ Smithsonian's National Zoo, Courtney Janney)

The giant panda cub at Washington's National Zoo appears to be in excellent health, zookeepers reported after a 10-minute physical exam Sunday morning.

The panda, born Friday afternoon, weighs 4.8 ounces (136 grams), is pink with white fur and wriggled and squealed loudly when it was taken away from its mother, zoo officials said.

A second cub was [stillborn](#) Saturday night, but zookeepers were still overjoyed at the prospect of one healthy cub given that pandas are critically endangered and breeding them in captivity has proved difficult, especially in Washington.

The cub's mother, Mei Xiang, gave birth to her only surviving cub, a male named Tai Shan, in 2005. Tai Shan enjoyed rock star status before he was returned to China in 2010. China owns the pandas at the Smithsonian's National Zoo.

The new cub had a full stomach, and veterinarians reported that it has been digesting its food, zoo spokeswoman Pamela Baker-Masson said Sunday. Its [heartbeat](#) is steady and its lungs appear to be functioning properly.

Mei Xiang gave birth to a cub last year after several years of failed breeding, but the cub died after six days. Its lungs hadn't fully developed and likely weren't sending enough oxygen to its liver.



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Following that disappointment, zookeepers changed their protocols for newborn [pandas](#) in consultation with Chinese breeders. The plan was for veterinarians to get their hands on the panda within 48 hours of its birth, and after two failed attempts on Saturday, panda keeper Marty Dearie was able to pry the cub away from Mei Xiang on Sunday morning.



In this Oct. 11, 2012, file photo Mei Xiang, a giant female panda, rests at the National Zoo in Washington. Mei Xiang gave birth to a cub at the Smithsonian's National Zoo 5:32 p.m. EDT on Friday, Aug. 23, 2013. Zoo keepers heard the cub vocalize and glimpsed the cub for the first time briefly immediately after the birth. Mei Xiang picked the cub up immediately and began cradling and caring for it.(AP Photo/Jacquelyn Martin, File)

"All the external features looked perfectly normal, so the cub has been described as vibrant, healthy and active," Baker-Masson said. "My colleagues were very, very happy. This is joyful news."

Mei Xiang was agitated when the cub was taken away from her, pacing and growling in her den, but the mother calmed down immediately after the cub was returned to her and she began cradling it, Baker-Masson said.



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Veterinarians will try to examine the cub again Tuesday. Its eyes have yet to open, and its gender will not be known for two to three weeks. A DNA sample was collected to determine the cub's paternity. Mei Xiang was artificially inseminated with sperm from Tian Tian, the male panda at the National Zoo, and a panda named Gao Gao at the San Diego Zoo.



In this image from video provided by the Smithsonian National Zoo, Mei Xiang gives birth to a cub two hours after her water broke Friday, Aug. 23, 2013, at the National Zoo in Washington. The zoo has been on round-the-clock panda watch since Aug. 7, when Mei Xiang began showing behavioral changes consistent with a pregnancy or pseudopregnancy. (AP Photo/Smithsonian National Zoo)

Zoo officials aren't sure what prevented the stillborn [cub](#) from developing, but it had abnormalities around its head and was missing its brain. Results from a necropsy won't be known for several days.

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