

Baby elephant dies suddenly, just before 2nd birthday

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This photo, provided by the Rosamond Gifford Zoo, shows elephant calf, Ajay, with his big brother, Batu, age 5, in Syracuse, N.Y. The Rosamond Gifford Zoo announced the death of Ajay, an Asian elephant calf, on Wednesday, Dec. 9, 2020. He died from Elephant Endotheliotropic Herpes Virus, which poses a high risk to young elephants. (Erin Fingar/Rosamond Gifford Zoo via AP)

A baby elephant at a Syracuse zoo died from a virus just before his second birthday .

The Rosamond Gifford Zoo in Syracuse announced the death of Ajay (Ah-JYE), an Asian elephant calf, on Wednesday. He died from Elephant Endotheliotropic Herpes Virus, which poses a high risk to young elephants.

Ajay was the second calf born to his mother, Mali, and father, Doc, the zoo said.

Blood samples from his 5-year-old brother Batu tested positive for the virus last week, and the zoo said it began aggressively treating him, though he showed no symptoms.

Staff also monitored Ajay, who was asymptomatic until Tuesday morning when staff observed swelling under his eyes and darkening on his tongue.

"Within two hours, despite the tireless efforts of the zoo and Cornell veterinary staff, he was gone," said Ted Fox, director of the zoo. "That is how awful this disease is, especially with young elephants. When it hits, it hits hard."

The virus is believed to occur naturally in [elephants](#) and may become active without warning, the zoo said. The zoo lost another [calf](#) in 2003 to the [virus](#).

Ajay, whose name was chosen in an online vote, was remembered as precocious and active. Ajay means "invincible" in Sanskrit, the zoo said.

He would have turned two on Jan. 15.

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