

BVA, BVNA, BSAVA and SPVS position on the microchipping of cats

Introduction

Microchipping is a safe, effective, and permanent way to identify individual animals.¹ Our Voice of the Veterinary Profession 2019 survey showed that over half (51%) of cats that vets see in practice are microchipped.²

It is difficult to obtain accurate data to estimate the total number of cats that are microchipped, as any data collected will only reflect the number of cats on a veterinary practice database or the answers of cat owners that are surveyed. VetCompass demographic data indicated that 23% of cats are microchipped³, SAVSNET estimates that around 40% of cats are microchipped.⁴ However, the PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report 2019 also indicated that 71% of cats were microchipped.⁵⁶

Welfare benefits and promotion of responsible ownership

We recognise that the microchipping of cats has the potential to improve animal welfare and promote responsible ownership.⁷ The ability to individually identify owned cats and trace the keeper has the potential to improve animal welfare and promote responsible ownership by enabling:

- Lost, stray and stolen cats to be returned to their owners more rapidly⁸;
- Quicker identification of injured cats meaning that owners are contacted more quickly for veterinary treatment to be agreed and undertaken promptly;
- Quicker and more accurate identification of dead cats and notification to owners;
- Health test results to be correctly attributed to an individual animal;
- Population data regarding cats be collected allowing more accurate prevalence data to be calculated;
- Tracing and identification of animals in the event of a disease outbreak, such as Rabies;
- Reinforcement of responsibilities of the owner under the Animal Welfare Act;
- Microchip activated technology, such as pet feeders or cat flaps, to support weight management and prevent unwanted animals the home;
- Easier detection of cat theft;
- Easier identification and subsequent arrest of owners culpable of animal cruelty; and
- Reduction of potential for fraud at cat shows.

Compulsory microchipping of cats

While we recognise the welfare benefits of individually identifying owned cats, we currently have concerns and reservations which we would like to see addressed before legislating for the compulsory microchipping of cats.

¹ To ensure effectiveness, it is important that all microchips are ISO compliant.

² In the Voice of the Veterinary Profession Autumn 2019 survey vets reported that 51% of cats that they see in practice are microchipped (535 base).

³ VetCompass. Infographics - Demographic information on UK pets: Cats. Available at: <https://www.rvc.ac.uk/vetcompass/learn-zone/infographics/uk>

⁴ Sánchez-Vizcaíno, F., Noble, P.M., Jones, P.H. et al. Demographics of dogs, cats, and rabbits attending veterinary practices in Great Britain as recorded in their electronic health records. BMC Vet Res 13, 218 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12917-017-1138-9>

⁵ PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report 2019. Available at: https://www.pdsa.org.uk/media/7420/2019-paw-report_downloadable.pdf

⁶ To arrive at the statistics used in the PAW Report, together with YouGov PDSA surveyed a demographically representative sample of UK cat, dog and rabbit owners, totalling 5036 respondents.

⁷ To ensure that microchipping is successful in its aims, it is important that all microchips are ISO compliant.

⁸ In the Voice of the Veterinary Profession Autumn 2019 survey 84% of vets surveyed (535 base) said that the most common reason for being unable to reunite stray cats with their owners was the absence of identifier information.

Aims of legislation

Any proposed legislation to introduce compulsory microchipping for cats must be clear in its aims, what public or animal welfare issue it is trying to address and how it will be enforced. To ensure successful implementation, adequate resources must be in place to support enforcement.

We note that the rationale for introducing the compulsory microchipping of dogs - to ensure public safety, to prevent nuisance and to control stray dogs - does not apply to the same extent, or in the same way, to cats as free roaming animals, or their owners.⁹

As outlined in [Cats and the Law: A plain English guide](#), the law accepts that cats will follow their free roaming instincts, therefore owners are unlikely to be held responsible for any damage that their cat causes where it can be argued that it results from a cat's natural behaviour. It is therefore unlikely that compulsory microchipping would reduce potential nuisances caused by roaming stray cats.

In addition, it is generally accepted that free roaming cats will cause less damage, and pose less of a threat to public safety, than stray dogs. The rationale for introducing the compulsory microchipping of dogs - to ensure public safety, to prevent nuisance and to control stray dogs - therefore does not apply to the same extent, or in the same way, to cats as free roaming animals.

Recommendation 1: Any proposed legislation to introduce compulsory microchipping for cats must be clear in its aims, what public or animal welfare issue it is trying to address, and how it will be enforced.

Feral or wild cats with no identifiable owner

In addition, it would be difficult to implement compulsory microchipping for wild-living, domestic cats who have no identifiable owner. We therefore question the potential effectiveness of a compulsory microchipping strategy for all cats, both owned and wild-living. To mitigate this, any compulsory microchipping strategy for all owned cats should be employed in conjunction with the promotion of overall responsible cat ownership, including promoting the health and welfare benefits of microchipping, neutering and vaccination to owners.

Further consideration could also be given to the use of [Trap-Neuter-Return](#) approach, which we support for the purposes of population control, to manage feral cat colonies and reduce numbers in a humane manner over time.

Recommendation 2: Any compulsory microchipping strategy for all owned cats would need to be employed in conjunction with the promotion of overall responsible cat ownership, including promoting the health and welfare benefits of microchipping, neutering and vaccination to owners.

Recommendation 3: Consideration should also be given to the use of [Trap-Neuter-Return](#) approach for population control to manage feral cat colonies and reduce numbers in a humane manner over time.

Age of implantation and chip size

Evidence from our members suggests that kittens are being microchipped at the point of first vaccination which is usually at the age of 8 weeks. Microchipping can also be done at the point of second vaccination (12 weeks, when kittens are larger and easier to handle), or at the time of neutering at 14-18 weeks when they are under general anaesthetic (which reduces potential stress from handling).

Veterinary surgeons use their professional judgement to determine the appropriate age of implantation of microchips in kittens. Factors that can inform this decision include:

- The kitten's size,
- The kitten's temperament and response to handling;
- Biosecurity considerations eg. avoiding having unvaccinated litters of kittens in the waiting room;

⁹ [Cats and the Law: A plain English guide](#),

- Whether microchip implantation can be performed alongside another healthcare intervention eg. a vet may implant a microchip when the kitten receives its vaccinations or is under general anaesthetic for neutering. This can minimise the need for repeat visits to the practice, as well as additional stress and handling.
- Re-homing policies by re-homing charities or similar organisations

We are also aware that for younger, smaller, kittens, the size of the needle required for the implantation of mini chips can still injure smaller kittens. We therefore question whether it would be appropriate to specify a specific age of implantation in legislation.

With this in mind, if compulsory microchipping of cats were to be introduced, legislation should specify an age range within which a kitten should be microchipped (eg. 8 weeks onwards and no later than 20 weeks), as opposed to an age limit (eg a kitten must be microchipped by 8 weeks). This would allow for age of implantation to be determined by a veterinary surgeon's professional judgement, based on the individual kitten's size, temperament, response to handling, and opportunities to implant alongside other healthcare interventions, and any other factors deemed relevant.

Recommendation 4: Age of implantation should be determined by a veterinary surgeon's professional judgement, based on the individual kitten's size, temperament, response to handling, and opportunities to implant alongside other healthcare interventions and any other factors deemed relevant.

Recommendation 5: If the compulsory microchipping of cats were to be introduced, legislation should specify an age range within which a kitten has to be microchipped (eg. 8 weeks onwards and no later than 20 weeks), as opposed to an age limit (eg. a kitten must be microchipped by 8 weeks).

Effective implementation of compulsory dog microchipping regulations across the UK

Crucially, before considering the introduction of compulsory microchipping for cats, the UK Governments must also address, and learn from, the issues that are currently preventing the effective implementation of compulsory dog microchipping regulations across the UK^{10,11,12,13}. In particular, the number of separate national databases currently in existence.

There is currently a total of 14 national databases with which pet owners can choose to register their animals. These databases do not currently share their data with each other, nor is there a central database. This is a growing issue, which threatens one of the key aims of compulsory microchipping – to help reunite lost dogs with their owners.

Our Voice of the Veterinary Profession 2019 showed that the most common reason for being unable to reunite stray dogs with their owner was that the identifier information on the microchip database was out of date or incorrect (68% of vets, base 535).

Although Check-a-Chip helps to identify which database holds the registration for a particular microchip number, it is not a central database.

For veterinary practice, cross-checking with such a large number of databases is an administrative burden which challenges already stretched vets and vet nurses, whose limited contact time with their clients and patients is better spent providing preventative healthcare advice. In addition, practices may not be aware of new databases that are established or ones that cease trading.

For compulsory microchipping legislation to be effective, it is essential that there is one central UK microchip database that is maintained and up-to-date. However, we recognise that this may be a

¹⁰ The Microchipping of Dogs (England) Regulations 2015

¹¹ Microchipping of Dogs (Scotland) Regulations 2016

¹² The Microchipping of Dogs (Wales) Regulations 2015

¹³ The Dogs (Licensing and Identification) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012

challenge given the proliferation of commercial databases in recent years, and so the implementation of one central UK microchip database is unlikely. Instead, we are calling for:

- All existing and future commercial microchip databases to register with EuroPetNet (or relevant equivalent). Petlog is currently the only UK database to be registered¹⁴
- Improved enforcement in relation to those databases which do not meet government standards.
- Exploration of the potential for setting up a single point of entry to query existing multiple real-time databases. The facility to enter a microchip number into a single web-based portal that could check all microchip databases would minimise the need for a manual search, increasing efficiency and protecting commercial interests.

[Read the BVA, BSAVA and SPVS position on microchipping scanning and databases, which sets out these issues in full.](#)

Recommendation 6: All existing and future commercial microchip databases should register with EuroPetNet (or relevant equivalent).

Recommendation 7: There should be improved enforcement in relation to those databases which do not meet government standards.

Recommendations 8: The potential for setting up a single point of entry to query existing multiple real-time databases should be explored.

¹⁴ <https://www.europetnet.com/member-organisations.html>

Annex A: Scanning for microchips

As set out in [the BVA, BSAVA and SPVS position on microchip scanning and databases](#), we recommend that veterinary practices should scan for a microchip under the following circumstances:

- **Prior to microchip implantation** – this helps to ensure that there is no other microchip present.
- **On presentation of a lost, stray or apparently unowned animal** – this facilitates reunification with the owner when checked against the national databases, providing the owner has kept their details up-to-date.
- **On first presentation at the practice** – this ensures that the animal is correctly identified when checked against the national databases and serves as a useful reminder to the new client to ensure that they keep their details up-to-date. The microchip details should be recorded on the practice database – often lost pets are local to the practice and a check against the practice's own database can provide a quick solution.
- **Before travelling abroad** – this is to ensure that the microchip is still working and has not migrated significantly and would not normally include a check against the national database(s).
- **Before rabies vaccination or official certification** – vets are obliged to scan for a microchip before administering a rabies vaccination and issuing a pet passport, or before completing other official documentation that requires identification of the animal (eg official health screening tests)
- **Annually as routine** (eg at the time of the annual check-up and/or booster vaccination) – this is also to ensure that the microchip is still working and has not migrated significantly. Although it would not normally include a check against the national databases it should include a check against practice records and provides an opportunity to remind the owner to keep their details up-to-date.
- **On admission for treatment or hospitalisation where appropriate** – this is part of good clinical practice to ensure that the patient is matched to clinical records. This would not normally include a check against the national database(s).
- **Prior to euthanasia if considered appropriate** – this is part of good clinical practice to ensure that the patient is matched to clinical records. This would not normally include a check against the national database(s) and in many cases may not be appropriate.
- **On presentation of wildlife** – this is to identify any wild animals part of a local or national, wildlife rehabilitation or research programme.

NOTE: practices and owners should be aware that occasionally, as a result of chip or scanner failure or incompatibility, efforts to scan may not be successful.