Compulsory microchipping: guidance for vets

This document aims to provide guidance to vets on the microchipping legislation and answer some common questions.

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Legislative background

From 24 February 2015 anyone (including the keeper) who finds a microchip has failed, moved from the site in which it was implanted and/or caused an abnormal reaction in the animal must report it via the VMD microchip adverse event reporting scheme.

From 6 April 2016 every keeper of a non-certified working dog older than 8 weeks must ensure that it is microchipped:

- The Microchipping of Dogs (England) Regulations 2015
- The Microchipping of Dogs (Scotland) Regulations 2016
- The Microchipping of Dogs (Wales) Regulations 2015
Certified working dogs

Any keeper of a certified working dog (a subsection (3) dog whose tail has been wholly or partly removed without contravening subsection (1)) must ensure that it is microchipped by a vet or a veterinary nurse acting under the supervision of a vet by the time it is 3 months old (Animal Welfare Act 2006).

Collars and tags

The obligation to microchip does not supersede the obligation to ensure your dog wears a collar or tag engraved with the name, address and postcode of the keeper when in a public place (The Control of Dogs Order 1992).

Scanning for microchips

There is currently no statutory obligation to scan a dog. However, the principal objective of compulsory microchipping dogs is to enable lost or stray dogs to be reunited with their keepers and veterinary practices will scan these animals when they are presented. BVA also recommends microchip scanning on first presentation to a veterinary practice. Where there is a keepership dispute or an animal is suspected stolen vets are advised to follow the RCVS Guidance on ‘Microchips, microchipping and animals without microchips.’

Frequently asked questions

- Scanning
- Responsibility of the vet
- Microchip adverse reactions
- Tattoos
- Exemption from microchipping

Scanning

Q Is there a requirement to scan a dog’s microchip on each presentation to a practice?
A No, but BVA recommends scanning a dog on first presentation to a practice and noting the microchip number in the clinical record. A microchip must also be scanned prior to rabies vaccination for the purposes of obtaining a pet passport.

Q Is there an obligation for the vet to check the microchip details against the various approved databases once scanned?

A No. In cases where there is a keepership dispute or an animal is suspected stolen vets can refer to the RCVS Guidance on 'Microchips, microchipping and animals without microchips.'

Q Is there an obligation for the vet to report when details recorded on the approved microchip database are not the same as those provided by the keeper?

A Where a microchip has been scanned and checked against the relevant approved database, but the information differs from that which the keeper has provided; vets can refer to the RCVS Guidance on 'Microchips, microchipping and animals without microchips.'

Responsibility of the vet

Q What is the vet's responsibility if a keeper refuses to have their dog microchipped?

A The responsibility of the vet is to ensure the keeper is aware of their obligation to have their dog microchipped and the benefits of doing so. It is not an offence to fail to get your dog microchipped. However, it is a punishable offence to:

- attempt to transfer keepership of a non-microchipped dog
- to fail to update the microchip data base once you have acquired a microchipped dog
- to fail to comply with a notice requiring you to microchip your dog
- to fail to report a microchip adverse event (failure or migration)

Q Does a vet have to inform the authorities if a keeper refuses to have their dog microchipped?
A There is no requirement for the vet to notify the authorities (police/local authority etc.) if a keeper elects not to have their dog microchipped.

Microchip adverse reactions

Q What will happen if I do not report an adverse microchip event?
A It is an offence not to report an adverse microchip event. Defra are unlikely to pursue prosecution in the event of failure to report an adverse microchip event unless there is evidence of a systematic failure to report. However, prosecutions may also be made by Local Authorities and the police, and Defra have no power over how they proceed. In the event that a case of systematic failure to report was made against a veterinary surgeon it would likely be referred to the RCVS and handled by the Preliminary Investigation committee.

Q What is the rationale behind reporting adverse microchip events?
A Reports will be used to identify individuals who are improperly implanting microchips, and to monitor chip migration and reliability.

Q How far must a microchip migrate before it needs to be reported?
A The ISO standard site for implanting a microchip in small animals is just beneath the skin of the midline, in between the shoulder blades. The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons are likely to update their supporting guidance later in 2015 to clarify that veterinary surgeons should make appropriate reports, similar to reports for adverse reactions to veterinary medicines, based on their judgement. Defra will be seeking advice on more objective measurements in the near future.

Q What do I do if I think I have found a failed microchip?
A Firstly, ensure the microchip scanner is fully powered, working correctly and is compatible with the microchip in the animal (some microchips used in other countries will not work with the scanners available in the UK). Fully scan the dog and if in doubt scan with a different microchip scanner.

If no microchip can be identified by the scanner, palpating the microchip under the skin or diagnostic imaging may be used if the keeper should wish for confirmation of the presence of a non-responsive microchip. The keeper may elect to re-microchip
the dog immediately. However, there is no onus on the keeper to re-microchip up to 6 April 2016, after which every keeper of a non-certified working dog older than 8 weeks must ensure that it is microchipped.

Q If the keeper is reporting an adverse microchip reaction, do I need to report it too?
A If you are certain the keeper is reporting the adverse microchip reaction it would be advisable to make a note of the conversation in the clinical record for the animal so there is a formal record that the client agreed to make the report directly to the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD). This provides some form of back up should the client fail to do so and go on to suggest that the vet was meant to do so.

Tattoos

Q If the dog has a tattoo does it need to be microchipped?
A Yes. Whilst some dogs may still travel on a tattoo (for Pet Travel purposes: tattoos are only an acceptable method of identification if they were applied before 3 July 2011 and are still legible) all dogs must be microchipped from 6 April 2016.

Exemption from microchipping

Q Are behavioural issues acceptable grounds on which to exempt a dog from microchipping?
A The law states that a veterinary surgeon may exempt an animal on the grounds of its health. Use of safe restraint or sedation may be necessary in order to microchip large or aggressive animals.

Q How can I certify an animal as exempt from the requirement to microchip?
A Defra have not yet finalised their certificate of exemption. As soon as the document is available we will provide a link for download/printing.