

Compulsory microchipping of dogs: Additional guidance for vets

Legislative background

On 6 April 2016 it became law for every keeper of a non-certified working dog older than 8 weeks to ensure that it is microchipped:

- [The Microchipping of Dogs \(England\) Regulations 2015](#),
- [The Microchipping of Dogs \(Wales\) Regulations 2015](#)
- [The Microchipping of Dogs \(Scotland\) Regulations 2016](#)
- [Dogs \(Amendment\) Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2011](#)

The responsibility of the vet is to inform the keeper of their obligation to have their dog microchipped and the benefits of doing so. It is the keeper's responsibility to ensure their dog is microchipped and registered on one of the authorised commercial databases.

If it is found that a dog has not been microchipped the veterinary surgeon does not have any responsibility to report the owner but whenever possible should advise the owner of their legal responsibility to have the dog microchipped. We would recommend that this advice is recorded in the animal's clinical record.

RCVS guidance on microchipping

The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) also sets out supporting guidance on microchipping, implantation, the Microchip Adverse Event Reporting Scheme, removing microchips and client confidentiality:

- [RCVS Microchips, microchipping and animals without microchips](#)
- [RCVS 'Client confidentiality and microchipped animals flowchart'](#), which vets should follow if there is an ownership dispute or an animal is suspected stolen.

BVA policy position on microchip scanning and microchip databases

In our policy [position](#) on microchip scanning and microchip databases we set out:

- the role of keepers and vets;
- the circumstances when we would recommend that veterinary practices scan for microchips; and
- our calls in relation to the proliferation of microchip databases.

Exemption from microchipping

The microchipping regulations include provision that all dogs are microchipped and their details recorded on a database. Puppies must be microchipped by the age of eight weeks and before transfer to a new keeper unless one of two exemptions apply:

1. Where a veterinary surgeon has certified the dog as a working dog in accordance with tail docking legislation in [England](#), [Wales](#) and [Scotland](#). In such cases the time limit for the dog to be microchipped and details recorded with a database is 12 weeks.
2. Where a veterinary surgeon certifies that a dog should not be microchipped because it would **adversely affect its health** (in Wales, the exemption requires certification that microchipping would significantly compromise the dog's health).

The following situations may require exemption from microchipping:

- **Size of dog** – while the majority of dogs can be safely implanted with a microchip before eight weeks of age there may be cases in toy or miniature breeds of dog where, in the professional judgement of the veterinary surgeon, microchipping should be delayed for a matter of weeks to allow the puppy to grow.
- **Severe illness** – where a dog has a severe debilitating illness it may be appropriate for the veterinary surgeon to recommend that microchipping is delayed for a short period to enable recovery to take place.

- **Infection or injury or adverse reaction at the normal site of microchipping** – where a dog has an infection or injury at the normal site of microchipping it may be appropriate for the veterinary surgeon to recommend that microchipping is delayed for a short period to enable recovery to take place. If the injury is likely to permanently preclude microchipping at the normal site the veterinary surgeon should consider implanting the microchip at a different site. The implantation site should be as close to the normal implantation site as possible to maximise the chance that the microchip will be located by routine scanning processes. Where a microchip is deliberately implanted at a different site this should be recorded in the clinical records and on any records relating to the microchip e.g. database records or Pet Passport.
- **Abnormalities of blood clotting** – where a dog has any condition that interferes with blood clotting it may be appropriate to delay microchip implantation until the situation has been rectified or stabilised.
- **Behavioural concerns** – where implantation of a nervous dog is considered likely to reinforce negative/fearful responses and adversely affect ongoing management and handling of that pet in future consultations, it may be appropriate to delay microchip implantation temporarily until the dog's behaviour can be suitably addressed.

Certificates of exemption

Guidance on writing a certificate of exemption and template certificates are available below for England, Scotland and Wales.

For England and Wales, the Certificate of Exemption is now held on the gov.uk. It was previously held on the BSAVA website which will hold a link to the new Gov page so that veterinary surgeons recording an exemption can be redirected to the correct form. Updated background and explanatory information around exemptions to microchip will continue to be displayed on the BSAVA website.

For Scotland the certificates can be found on the MyGov.Scot website.

We recommend that vets include the reason for the exemption by noting it on the certificate. It is also important to ensure that the owner of the dog, or person authorised to represent the owner, signs the certificate to confirm that they understand that the certificate is only valid for a certain period.

Note: Dogs must be microchipped on expiry of a time limited certificate unless a veterinary surgeon issues a further exemption certificate because the s/he still has concerns over the dog's health. Ensuring that the dog is implanted with a microchip following expiry of the exemption certificate is the responsibility of the owner/keeper and the veterinary surgeon does not have any specific responsibility to enforce this.

Microchip adverse reactions

Legislation requires that vets must report:

- adverse reactions to microchipping,
- migration of a microchip from the site of implanting
- or the failure of a microchip.

From the 18th December, the VMD will no longer be hosting the Microchip Adverse Events Reporting Form. Reporters can now report an unexpected reaction to a microchip to Defra. The new process will include filling in the form which will be hosted on gov.uk and emailing it to microchipping@defra.gov.uk. Any queries to do with Microchip Adverse Events Reporting can also be directed to microchipping@defra.gov.uk

An adverse reaction is defined in the regulations as a microchip that causes any unnecessary pain or suffering or any pathology that is or seems to be caused by the implantation of a microchip, or a microchip that has migrated from the implantation site or failed. Although the regulation only applies to dogs it would be good practice to report adverse reactions to microchips in other species as well.

Types of adverse event

Implantation Reactions

These usually occur relatively soon after implantation and are commonly linked to the implantation procedure eg haematomas (bleeding under the skin) or infection (an abscess near the site or an infection spreading systemically, making the animal ill).

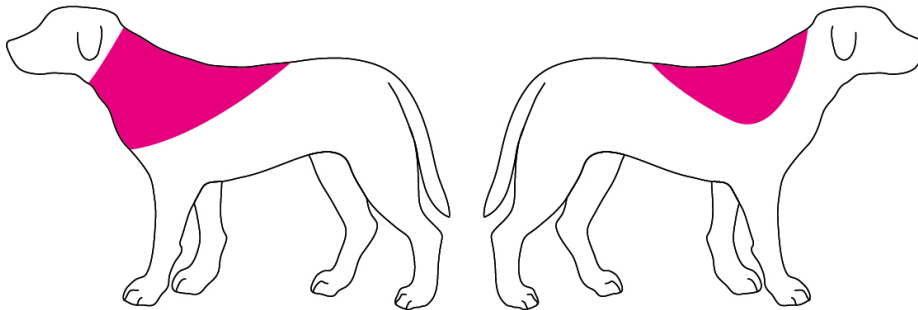
On rare occasions, an animal may react to an implanted microchip, as with any foreign material introduced into the body, with an inflammatory response. These along with any evidence of infection or other pathology should be reported as adverse events.

There are a very small number of reports of paralysis resulting from implantation into the spinal cord. Although these relate to problems with implantation technique rather than a problem with the microchip, these should also be reported. There have also been a very small number of cancers reported around the site of microchip implantation. Although these may or may not be related to the implantation of the microchip (c.f. feline injection site sarcomas) these should still be reported so that the VMD is able to collect accurate data on the incidence of these types of reaction.

Microchip Migration

Migration from the site of implantation is now classed as an adverse event. However, as there is no requirement to record the site of microchip implantation on the animal's record or microchip database, actual migration – as opposed to incorrect placement at initial implantation – is difficult to ascertain. For this reason, we recommend that unless the veterinary surgeon has more detailed evidence on implantation site, for example from their own records or through entry in a Pet Passport, microchips located within the areas indicated in red on the diagram below (which covers the recommended UK and European sites for implantation and allows for minor errors of positioning at implantation) do not need to be reported as having migrated.

Reporting – not required in shaded area



Microchip Failure

The veterinary surgeon is only expected to report microchip failure where they have some evidence that a microchip had been present, for example through a registration document or patient record that provides details of a microchip number. As the microchip number is essential for reporting to the VMD the owner should be strongly encouraged to locate this information.

If an owner presents an animal without a working microchip and with no evidence of a microchip having been present, the veterinary surgeon can offer diagnostic imaging to ascertain if a microchip is present. Please note that members of the Microchip Trade Association [are only likely to consider payment for imaging if a non-functioning chip is detected](#).

An animal with a failed microchip will need to have a new microchip implanted unless it qualifies for exemption. Where a second microchip is implanted it is recommended that the veterinary surgeon records details of the reason for re-implantation and where appropriate provides a written declaration to the owner with information about both the old and new microchip.

Failed microchips and Pet Passports

Given the potential implications if a microchip fails on entry to the UK – such as the cost to the owner of resulting time in quarantine – veterinary surgeons should encourage their clients to have their pet’s microchip checked before travel.

Defra provides the following advice on unreadable microchips:

- If the original microchip cannot be read, the pet must be re-implanted;
- If the pet has been previously prepared for travel, then it must be re-prepared in accordance with pet travel rules and a new Pet Passport issued;
- The issuing veterinary surgeon should note in the ‘OTHERS’ Section (XII) of the passport that there is another microchip present (and the number of that microchip) that cannot be scanned and read, in case the fault is intermittent and the chip is picked up at the port when the pet is checked for compliance for entry to the UK.

Intermittently working microchips and Pet Passports

If the microchip has not failed completely, Defra recommends that a new microchip is inserted in case the existing microchip fails at some point in the future. The following procedure must be carried out in order to maintain a pet’s compliance:

- The original microchip, implanted prior to the initial rabies vaccination, must be scanned and a reading made. If a reading is not possible it will be necessary to complete the procedures for a failed microchip;
- Having gained a reading, a new microchip may then be inserted. In cases where a second microchip is inserted, in the OTHERS section of the passport (XII) the Official Veterinarian should write: “On (date), I scanned and read microchip number (original). Upon gaining a reading, I inserted microchip number (new) on the same day, in accordance with Defra requirements” (or similar wording).

This statement does not need to be exactly as shown, but the dates of microchip readings and the numbers of the microchips must be stated and this statement should be signed and stamped by the OV. Provided this procedure is carried out as stated above, the pet will remain fully compliant with UK entry requirements under EU pet movement rules.