

Microchipping and new legislation

In recent years, many owners have voluntarily opted to use microchipping and subsequent registration as an easy, permanent way to identify their pets if they go missing or are stolen. Also if an owner wanted to travel with their pet, the pet has to be microchipped in order to obtain a pet passport.

As pets without microchips cannot be reunited with their owners easily, in the past they have either ended up with the local dog warden or with one of the many charities that tirelessly operate throughout the country.

On Friday 20th March 2015 new legislation made under the Animal Health & Welfare Act 2013 was signed by Minister Coveney in Glenina Veterinary Clinic. This states that all dogs are now legally required to be microchipped among other stipulations. Pets including horses, cats, ferrets etc of any age can be microchipped and then registered. With new pups, this now legally needs to be done by the time they are 12 weeks old.

What is Micro chipping and how does it work?

Microchipping is a two step process and compliance with the new legislation requires completion of both steps :-

- a) insertion of a tiny computer chip under the skin of a pet by an authorised person, usually between the shoulder blades
- b) registration of the pet on a specific database

The tiny computer chip (size of a rice grain) contains a unique 15-digit identification number that can be attributed to an individual animal. It is encapsulated within a biocompatible material (same material used to make human pacemakers). Once inserted, the pet's body tissue surrounding the microchip attaches itself, preventing movement of the chip where it will stay for the life of the animal. This provides a permanent identification which cannot be lost, changed or deliberately removed. A radio signal transmitted from a scanner is used to read this number through the skin of your pet.

Registration is a vital part of the process as microchips must be registered alongside the owners' details on an authorised database. If the pet is re-homed or the owners' details change, then the database needs to be up-dated. This may incur a nominal administration fee.

Most countries have at least one database, and many of these form part of international networks. For example, Fido's list of registered microchips is shared with [EuroPetNet](#). All Irish microchipped animals are

registered on a European database so you can choose which company you like to register with. If a pet is moved to a new country for long periods of time, then the pet needs to be registered with that specific country database within three weeks.

Once a lost pet is scanned by an authorised person such as dog wardens, veterinarians/ veterinary nurses or animal welfare centre professionals, the database information can be accessed in order to trace their owners as long as their information is up to date.

Other uses for microchips include activated feeders or door flaps that scan and recognise the specific microchip numbers. This will stop other animals from stealing food or entering the house.

New Legislation on microchipping

The dog microchipping programme will be rolled out on a phased basis, beginning with pups in September 2015 and will be expanded to all dogs in March 2016. The scheme is going to be enforced by local authorities, DAFM and An Garda Síochána will be responsible for enforcing the law. Veterinary professionals will also be asked to remind owners to microchip their dogs. The focus will be on encouraging compliance but

enforcement remains an important tool to be used in appropriate circumstances.

Owners of dogs found without a chip after April 2016 will have a short amount of time to have the procedure carried out. Those who refuse to microchip their dogs could face a fine of up to €5,000.

At the signing of the new regulations, Minister Coveney stated *“widespread Microchipping of all dogs will have a number of positive benefits. It will provide a basic tool to protect the welfare of all dogs and assist with speedily uniting stray dogs with their owners.”* Furthermore he said *“it will act as a deterrent for those who abandon dogs and assist in identifying marauding dogs and those that pose a threat to livestock or people.”*

The Minister also said that many responsible owners have already had their dog’s microchipped and the vast majority of these will be compliant with the new regulations. These will require that the microchip used to be ISO compliant and that the microchip details are registered on a database. The Minister added *“it is important that dog owners ensure that the registered details are up to date and correct so that if their dog is lost they can be contacted.”*

Colm McGovern MVB of Glenina Vets added that microchipping is a one off event and once correctly registered, it lasts a lifetime. Other microchipping initiatives are expected to be introduced by animal welfare charities in the near future.

Sadly, the reality is that many thousands of dogs and cats go missing each year. It is estimated that less than half of them are reunited with their owners. Therefore, this new legislation is widely welcomed by both the veterinary profession, local authorities and charities to help reduce this occurring.