

## Compulsory Microchipping- Advice for Owners

**From 6 April 2016 all dogs in England and Wales have to be microchipped. NAWT's microchipping advice sheet highlights the changes and complexities at stake.**

### What's a microchip?

It's a tiny device that is implanted under the skin of an animal, normally between the shoulder blades. Each microchip carries a unique 15-digit number that can only be read by a special scanner. This number is linked to an entry on a database that stores the animal's information plus details of his or her keeper. If your pet is lost or stolen, then this is one of the best ways of tracing him or her.



### How do I get my dog chipped?

First it's always worth checking if your dog is already microchipped. If it isn't, then you need to go to someone who is authorised to microchip an animal. This is normally a vet, vet nurse or anyone else who has been specially trained.

### Does the compulsory microchip only apply to dogs?

Yes the law only applies to dogs, although we would always recommend that cats and other mammals that spend time away from the home also be microchipped- see our case study below.

### What are the consequences if you don't follow the legal requirements?

If your dog is picked up by a local authority, then it will be scanned to check for a chip. If none is found and you, as keeper, are traced then you will be served a notice to get the dog chipped within 21 days. Failure to do this could result in a criminal record and a £500 fine.

### If my dog's already got one, do I have to do anything?

That's great that your dog is already microchipped, the next step is to make sure the database records are kept up to date. Microchips need to be registered to what the law calls the "keeper"- that is the individual with whom the dog normally resides. In most cases the owner and the keeper will be the same person, but it is very important that you ensure the details are accurate and comply with the guidelines set out by law. If the record is found to be inaccurate then the law will not regard the dog as microchipped even if one has been implanted.

Check your records by either going through the paperwork you were issued with at the time you rehomed your dog/ had it microchipped, or alternatively by visiting your vet or rescue centre and asking them to scan the chip to get the number. You can then enter the number in to a free service to check which of the six official databases your dog's microchip is linked to. [Petlog](#) has a useful 'Look up a microchip' service on its home page.

### Is a microchip proof of ownership?

No- not in itself. You are therefore advised to keep other records e.g. receipts, documentation at the time of the purchase of your dog, in case you ever need to prove ownership.

### **If they're making microchipping compulsory, are they improving the traceability of animals?**

Database companies operate a 24 hour service 365 days of the year. As soon as they receive a call to notify them of a missing or stolen pet, the pet's record will be flagged with a notice to that effect. If your animal is picked up by the dog warden or local authority then they are authorised to scan for the chip number and check the databases for a match using a special access PIN. This should always be done in order to try and trace lost or stolen pets.

While this service is certainly welcome, it is still not regarded as totally foolproof. High profile cases of animals being stolen or lost and then sold on to unwitting new owners have revealed problems that can occur if animal is not scanned for a microchip. Vets, rescues and local authorities are not required by law to scan a new pet. It was only last year that the government gave a mandate to the Highways Agency to scan all domestic animals found dead on major roads, but there are no plans to even make that a legal requirement. NAWT thinks campaigning will continue to further improve the traceability of animals as the microchipping law comes in to force.

### **Is microchipping the only thing I need to keep legal?**

While there is no doubt microchipping should assist with the traceability of pets, another, little known but long standing law is the compulsory wearing of a collar and ID tag. The Control of Dogs Order 1992 states any dog in a public place must wear a collar and ID tag that clearly displays the name and address of the owner and phone number. In reality it is rarely enforced, but remains another useful way of helping dogs be reunited with their owners.

### **If I get my pet from a breeder will it be microchipped already?**

All breeders have to microchip their puppies by the age of eight weeks. There are almost no exceptions to this rule. Failure to do so will result in a criminal offence. Furthermore it is the breeder's responsibility to provide microchipping documents to the puppy buyer to ensure the new owner can update their details in order to comply with the law. If you are rehoming a pet from a rescue organisation such as NAWT, they will be microchipped already with your own details and you will be made aware of the number the day you take them home.

### **Did you find this article useful?**

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### Case Study: Minky and the Roses- reunited after 3 years



Minky went missing in 2011 when the Rose family moved from Wiltshire to Somerset. They kept their four cats in for some time after the move, but when the day came to let them out, only three came back. Hope began to fade after weeks of fruitless searching. Meanwhile, at the other end of the village, Minky had found an old lady to take care of her. When her new “owner” died and the cat was brought in to our Somerset centre, a routine scan to see if she had a microchip revealed the Roses’ contact details. Luckily the mobile number was still correct, and there were cries of joy when staff told them the happy news. Minky was reunited with Mr Rose that same day and taken home to rejoin the family, more than three years after she originally went missing.

### Vets Get Scanning Appeal

If it wasn't for the fact that NAWT Trustee Debbie Matthews has a famous father- Sir Bruce Forsyth- she rather doubts she would have ever retrieved her stolen dogs Gizmo and Widget.

Thanks to a high profile media campaign the dogs were returned, but the emotional ordeal and the fact that her dogs' microchips hadn't been of any use in finding them, turned Debbie in to a campaigner for pet and owners' rights. He set up Bruce Forsyth's Vets Get Scanning petition to lobby to help close the current loopholes in legislation, and demand standard procedures for rescue, dog wardens, councils and other agencies when it comes to scanning animals that come in for the first time.

The NAWT is supporting the campaign and if you'd like to get involved too please join Vets Get Scanning through Facebook, Twitter or by visiting [www.vetsgetscanning.co.uk](http://www.vetsgetscanning.co.uk)

**Bruce Forsyth's  
Vets Get Scanning appeal  
Sign the petition today!**

**UK GET  
SCANNING  
FOR MICROCHIPS**

[www.VetsGetScanning.co.uk](http://www.VetsGetScanning.co.uk)