

The new dog microchipping laws: What you need to know

What is microchipping?

Did you know that 8.5 million families in the UK have at least one dog?¹

Dogs aren't just pets; they're family members. Losing a dog can be akin to losing a relative or loved one, so it is becoming increasingly common that owners are looking to take additional steps to prevent such losses.

A microchip is a tiny electronic chip, no larger than a grain of rice, which is implanted harmlessly beneath a dog's skin. Each microchip is programmed with a unique 15 digit number which will be revealed when scanned by a microchip reader.

If an animal professional (such as a vet) is presented with a lost pet they will routinely scan for a microchip. If one is detected, they simply contact the microchip database the pet is registered on and reveal the keeper's details so the pet can be returned home.



The implant procedure is pain-free, inexpensive, and generally, won't cause any more discomfort to your dog than a standard vaccination.

Simply put, it's a swift and effective way of reuniting you with your dog should it ever go missing and get picked up by strangers.

From April 2016, all dogs will need to be microchipped by law, and it will be the keeper's responsibility to ensure that all of their contact information is accurate and up-to-date; this can be as simple as updating a form on a website.

¹ PFMA Pet Population Consensus, 2015 (<http://www.pfma.org.uk/pet-population-2015>)



So what is the new legislation?

Three years ago the UK Government introduced plans to change the way we 'register' our pets. On April 6th, that new legislation is coming into practice. From this date forward, every dog in England, Scotland and Wales will be required by law to be microchipped.

Compulsory microchipping has already been in place in Northern Ireland since 2012.

The legislation is primarily designed to make it easier for lost pets to be reunited with their keepers, but it will also make it easier to identify dogs that are involved in incidents and trace them back to an individual who might then be held to account.

Many dogs have already undergone the procedure, but it is estimated that there are still at least 2 million that still need to be microchipped.²

According to the new legislation, all dogs over the age of 8 weeks will need to be microchipped. In order for microchips to be compliant with the new law, the details linked to them must be registered on an approved database and kept up to date by all dog keepers, including breeders.

Anyone who doesn't have their dog microchipped by April 6th will have 21 days to comply or may face a penalty fine of up to £500.

Why is the new legislation being implemented?

"The introduction of the new microchipping regulations will help educate the dog owning population of the importance of not only microchipping but the essential supporting registration on a microchip database. We know there is a vast amount of misunderstanding about the procedure but now that it is going to be a legal requirement we have the opportunity to improve this knowledge, increase the number of microchipped dogs and ultimately bring more lost pets home." – Beverley Campbell, Anibase.

Dog owners, veterinary practices and welfare groups are all in agreement that microchipping is a good idea, so why is there a Government need to enforce it?

² Report: 'The Microchipping of Dogs (England) Regulations 2015' (legislation.gov.uk)





Most dog owners are extremely responsible and very caring individuals who not only train and look after their pets but respect their place in society and respect the boundaries of others. Such owners are likely to have already had their pets microchipped to safeguard against losing them, so the new legislation will have little impact on them. For those caring dog owners who haven't yet had their dog microchipped, they

won't mind doing so when the time comes in April, and it's probably something they were planning on doing anyway.

Unfortunately, though, there are still countless dogs who stay lost, never to be reunited with their keepers. Of these dogs, the vast majority are not microchipped.

In 2014, over 60,000 dogs in the UK were reported missing or stolen. Of those, 16,122 weren't microchipped and as a result were not able to be reunited with their keepers³

The figure above is alarming and there's clearly an issue that needs resolving, but why the legislation? More than simply reuniting dogs with their keepers, here are some of the things that enforcement of microchipping is hoping to achieve:

- For dogs that are stolen, it will help to reunite them with their legal keeper and assist in resolving disputes.
- Dogs that are abused or mistreated before being abandoned may be traced back to a registered keeper, making prosecution of abusers more possible.
- Breeders will also have to have their dogs microchipped when they reach the age of 8 weeks, so dogs that come from 'puppy farms' or illegitimate, unregulated breeders will be easier to track and police.

More than anything, the new legislation will help the dogs themselves. In the eyes of the law, dogs are still regarded as a 'possession' like anything else in your home, but for families and dog owners up and down the country, this couldn't be further from the truth - one of the many reasons this new legislation has been welcomed with open arms.

³ The Kennel Club, press release, 2014



What do you need to do as a dog owner?

To get ready for the new legislation you will need to have your dog microchipped before the 6th April 2016 if they are 8 weeks or older. If your dog is found not to be microchipped after this time, you'll be given 21 day to have the procedure done.

If you fail to get your dog microchipped in this time you may face a penalty of £500 or have your dog removed by a warden who will arrange the procedure and pass on the costs to you.

If your dog is extremely old or in poor health, a vet may excuse it from being microchipped.

Did you know that around 40% of dogs who are microchipped have missing or inaccurate information?⁴

Microchipping is an excellent deterrent against animal theft and cruelty, and can help reunite lost dogs with their keepers, but like many things microchips are only as useful as the information recorded on them. A lost dog with outdated information linked to its microchip is as good as a dog with no microchip at all, and the new legislation is taking this seriously. In order for you and your dog to be compliant with the law, it'll be your responsibility to ensure that the information associated with your dog's microchip is up to date, including your address and contact details.

Your dog can be microchipped by your local vet, or you might be able to get the procedure done for free with companies such as Dogs Trust who are offering a subsidised microchipping service to help get dogs on official records.

⁴ National Dog Warden Association, Report, 2014



Frequently asked questions about microchipping

Q: How will the Government enforce compulsory microchipping?

A: The 'Microchipping of Dogs (England) Regulations, 2014' will be enforced by the police, community support officers and other local authorities who given the power to act by the Secretary of State. This means that if you lose your dog and he/she isn't microchipped, it's likely that you'll be found out and face charges.

Q: What's the difference between a 'keeper' and an 'owner'?

A: The word 'keeper' has been introduced into this legislation to make it easier to enforce. Breeders, for example, might not regard themselves as 'dog owners', but they are still responsible for getting their dogs microchipped if they are older than 8 weeks - so 'keeper' refers to anybody that's in charge of the animal or responsible for its care.

It's also important to note that having a dog microchipped is not proof of ownership in the eyes of the current legislation.

Q: What happens if I don't get my dog microchipped by April 6th?

A: If your dog is found to not have a microchip, you'll be given a 21 day notice period to get the procedure done. Failure to comply will result in a fine of up to £500.

Q: My dog is sick; is he/she exempt from being microchipped?

A: If you feel your dog is too old or sick to undergo the procedure, it's important you raise this with your vet before April 6th so they can issue an exemption certificate. Failure to get a certificate may still result in a fine.

Q: What if I'm buying my dog from a breeder?

A: If you're adopting your dog from a registered and professional breeder, the dog will already be microchipped with the breeder's details attached. Once you take ownership and responsibility of the dog, it's important that you add your details too.

Q: I had to pay for the microchip. Will it expire or need renewing?

A: Microchips, once implanted, will stay with the dog for life so you never have to worry about renewing it. The only thing that dog keepers need to focus on is keeping their details up to date online. However, it is advisable to always have the microchip tested by your vet prior to travel if you are taking you pet abroad as part of the Pet Travel Scheme (PETS).





Q: How do I update my details?

A: This depends on the provider you choose and where you have your dog microchipped. If you are unsure which microchip database your pet is registered on you can visit any of the UK microchip databases and use the microchip checker on their homepage to determine which database you need to contact. Most of the databases offer an online option to update your details, you will simply need your microchip number and the unique security password you were provided with at the point of registration.

Q: Does it cost me to update my details?

A: Your details shouldn't need to be updated very often; only if you move home or change your primary contact details. Databases will charge a very small fee in order to cover administration costs when you need to change your details. Often there's an affordable 'premium' upgrade option which will allow you to change your details as many times as you'd like throughout the dog's life.

Q: Will the microchip allow me to find my dog with GPS?

A: No - Microchips are not GPS devices. They remain inactive until scanned by a microchip reader which will display the unique 15 digit number. This allows the animal professional scanning your dog to contact the registering database and retrieve the keeper details the microchip is registered to.

Q: Where and how is the chip implanted?

A: The microchip is implanted using a sterilised needle between the dog's shoulder blades and shouldn't take more than a few seconds.

Q: Will the implant hurt my dog?

A: If you're a responsible dog owner you've no doubt taken your dog to the vets before for vaccinations. This procedure is very similar and requires no anaesthetic - your dog shouldn't feel any more discomfort than it would from a standard injection.



In summary...

The new dog microchipping law is a good thing. It's something that many animal welfare organisations have been campaigning a number of years for. Getting your dog microchipped is quick, painless and affordable (even free at selected subsidised clinics), and it's the best chance you have at being reunited with your beloved pet should they ever go missing.

It's also something the government has been planning for a number of years to help reduce cost burdens on the taxpayer and aid with the prosecutions of those who neglect or abuse dogs.

Thousands of dogs go missing every year in the UK, costing UK taxpayers upwards of £33 million to shelter, feed and keep them safe⁵

So why not visit your Vetsure vet to find out more about having your dog microchipped. On April 6th, you'll be glad you did.

⁵ UK, Trinity Mirror, Report on microchipping laws (<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/dog-microchipping-laws-what-changes-7113932>)

