

Microchipping FAQ

Q: What is a microchip?

A: A microchip is a small, electronic chip enclosed in a glass cylinder that is about the same size as a grain of rice and does not have a battery—it is activated by a scanner that is passed over the area, and the radiowave from the scanner activates the chip. The chip transmits the identification number to the scanner, which displays the number on a screen. The chip is also called a transponder.

Q: How is a microchip implanted into an animal? Is it painful? Does it require surgery or anesthesia?

A: It is injected under the skin using a hypodermic needle. It is no more painful than a typical injection and is much smaller than those used for injection. No surgery or anesthesia is required—a microchip can be implanted during a routine office visit. If your pet is already under anesthesia for a procedure, such as neutering or spaying, the microchip is implanted while they're still under anesthesia.

Q: What kind of information is contained in the microchip? Is there a tracking device in it? Will it provide any information?

A: The microchips presently used in pets only contain identification numbers. No, the microchip is not a tracking device. It is used to identify your animal if it gets lost. Although the present technology microchip itself does not contain your pet's information, microchip registration databases will allow you to store that information in the database for quick retrieval.

Some microchips used in research laboratories and for microchipping some livestock and horses also contain information about an animal's body temperature.

Q: Should I be concerned about my privacy if my pet is microchipped? Will someone be able to track my pet?

A: You don't need to be concerned about your privacy. The information you provide to the manufacturer is used to contact you in the event your pet is found and their microchip is scanned. In most cases, you can opt out of receiving communications (such as newsletters or advertisements) from the manufacturer. The only information stored in the database is the information that you choose to provide when you register the chip or update your information. The database is not a public place so that a random person can't just look up an owner's identification.

Remember that having the microchip placed is only the first step, and the microchip must be registered in a database to increase your chances of getting your pet back. If that information is missing or incorrect, your chances of getting your pet back are reduced.

Q: What do they mean by "microchip frequency?"

A: The frequency of a microchip actually refers to the frequency of the radiowave given off by the microchip. Examples of microchip frequencies used in the U.S. include 125 kilohertz (kHz), 128 kHz, and 134.2 kHz.

Q: I've heard about something called "ISO standard." What does that mean?

For microchipped animals that weren't returned to their owners, the most common reason was an incorrect telephone number in the microchip registry database. So don't forget to register your pet's microchip [up-to-date](#).

Q: Does a microchip replace identification tags and rabies tags?

A: Absolutely not. Microchips are great for permanent identification that is tamper-proof, but nothing replaces identification tags. If a pet is wearing a collar with tags when it's lost, it's often a very quick process to find the owner; however, the information on the tags needs to be accurate and up-to-date. But if a pet is not wearing a collar or the collar is lost or removed, then the presence of a microchip might be the only way the pet's owner can be identified.

Your pet's rabies tag should always be on its collar, so people can quickly see that your pet has been vaccinated for rabies disease. Rabies tag numbers also allow tracing of animals and identification of a lost animal's owner. Rabies tag numbers traced after veterinary clinics or county offices are closed for the day. The microchip database is a national database, and is accessible 24/7/365.

Q: I just adopted a pet from the animal shelter. Is it microchipped? How can I find out?

A: If the shelter scanned the animal, they should be able to tell you if it is microchipped. Some shelters do not scan animals they adopt out, so check with the shelter and find out your new pet's microchip number so you can register it.

Most veterinary clinics have microchip scanners, and your veterinarian can scan your new pet for a microchip during its veterinary checkup. Microchips show up on radiographs (x-rays), so that's another way to find out.

Q: Why should I have my animals microchipped?

A: The best reason to have your animals microchipped is the improved chance that you'll get your animals back if they are stolen.

Q: I want to get my animal(s) microchipped. Where do I go?

A: To your veterinarian, of course! Most veterinary clinics keep microchips on hand; so, it is likely that you can get your animal microchipped the same day as your appointment. Sometimes local shelters or businesses will host a microchip event.

Q: Why can't I just buy the microchip and implant it myself?

A: It looks like a simple-enough procedure to implant a microchip – after all, it's just like giving an injection. Although it looks like a simple injection, it is very important that the microchip is implanted properly. Inserting the needle too deeply, or placing it in the wrong location can not only make it difficult to detect or read but also cause life-threatening problems. Microchips should really be implanted under supervision by a veterinarian who knows where the microchips should be placed, know how to place them, and know how to recognize complications if they occur.

Q: Once the microchip has been implanted, what do I do? Is there any sort of maintenance required?

A: There really is no maintenance required for microchips themselves, although you do need to register your pet's contact information up-to-date in the microchip registration database. If you notice any abnormalities at the site where the microchip was implanted, such as drainage (oozing) or swelling, contact your veterinarian. Ideally, the microchip should be checked during your animal's regular wellness/preventive care exams to make sure that it's still in place and working as intended.

A: No, you do not need to have one of the microchips removed and no, they will not interfere with each other. Whether a scanner will detect each chip will depend on the scanner used – if it is a universal (forward- and backward-reading) scanner, it will detect each chip as it is passed over it. To detect the other chip, the scanner has to be reset and passed over the other chip. If it is a scanner that only reads one microchip frequency, it will only detect a microchip of that specific frequency and not the other microchip.

If you know your pet has more than one microchip implanted, make sure you keep the database information for all microchips. People don't routinely assume there's more than one microchip (because it is very uncommon for a pet to have more than one microchip) based on the registry number of the microchip they detect.

Q: My pet has a non-ISO standard, 125 kHz microchip implanted, and I want to have it implanted with an ISO standard microchip. Can I do that?

A: Sure you can. Both chips will function normally. If your pet is scanned with a scanner that only reads 125 kHz chip will be detected. If your pet is scanned with a universal (forward- and backward-reading) scanner, both chips will be detected separately (see the question above this one for more information).

Q: I'm relocating to a country that requires ISO chips, and my pet does not have an ISO chip. What do I need to do?

A: Your pet will need to be implanted with an ISO microchip before it will be allowed into that country. You need to know: countries differ widely on their importation rules, including different regulations about quarantine periods once the animal enters that country. If you do some research and preparation, you can ensure a smooth transition. Contact the country of origin to determine their requirements regarding microchips as well as vaccinations. Alternatively, you can contact an experienced animal shipper who is well-versed in the processes and regulations affecting animal shipment.

Q: I'm relocating to a country that requires ISO chips, and my pet has an ISO chip. What do I need to do?

A: In general, your pet won't need another microchip to be allowed into that country; however, you need to know: countries differ widely on their importation regulations as you plan your relocation. That's not the only thing you need to know: countries differ widely on their importation rules, including different regulations about required vaccinations and quarantine periods once the animal enters that country. If you do some research and preparation, your pet's relocation can go smoothly. Contact the country of origin to determine their requirements regarding microchips as well as vaccinations, certificates, etc. Alternatively, you can contact an experienced animal shipper who is well-versed in the processes and regulations affecting animal shipment.

Q: Why isn't it a requirement that all shelters and veterinary clinics use the same microchips? Why do different frequencies of microchips and each requires a separate scanner, why aren't they required to use the same scanner so microchips are never missed?

A: There is no federal or state regulation of microchip standards in the U.S., and different manufacturers use different microchip technologies with different frequencies. Because of market competition, animal shelters and veterinary clinics are able to choose from several microchip manufacturers and scanners. Microchip scanners are relatively expensive, so many keep one or more of each type of microchip scanner.

This problem can be solved by the use of universal microchip scanners, which are readily available. Requiring universal microchips would be a good step in developing a consistent microchipping system in the U.S.

Q: When I have my pet microchipped, is there one central database that registers the information and notifies animal shelters and veterinary clinics in case my pet is lost or stolen?