

Common Questions about Microchips

The brave new world of microchipping has left pet owners with questions. In this section, the experts at The HSUS answer them.

I have heard there are problems with microchipping pets. What are the issues surrounding microchipping?

Microchipping is a great tool to help you reunite with a lost pet; however, it is not foolproof. When a lost pet is picked up by an animal control officer or is taken to an animal shelter or humane society, the professionals there will scan the animal using a handheld scanner, which will let them know if a microchip has been implanted. The microchip implanted under the skin reflects the signal given by the scanner to provide a unique alpha numeric code, which is picked up when the animal is scanned. Microchips implanted in 2003 or earlier are generally readable by most shelters and veterinarians. Microchips that came into use in late 2003 are generally not readable by most shelters and veterinarians because the chips require different scanning technology. Microchip manufacturers have not yet provided shelters around the country with a scanner that reads all different types of microchips (called a "universal" scanner).

What is the problem for animal shelters and humane societies with different types of microchips available on the market?

Each company that manufactures microchips has its own scanners, and some of these scanners can only "read" their own microchip. In other words, in some instances, the scanner of one company may not be able to detect the microchip of another manufacturer, which would indicate to the shelter staff that the lost animal is not microchipped. Without the ability to use one scanner for all types of microchips, shelter staff would have to scan the animal, who may be fearful and difficult to handle, multiple times with each manufacturer's scanner. Additionally, some companies provide their scanners free to shelters, some do not. Without sufficient numbers of free scanners available to equip all animal control vehicles as well as shelters, microchipped animals may go unscanned by agencies, which can't afford to purchase multiple scanners from multiple manufacturers.

My animal has already been microchipped, how do I know if my local shelter will be able to read the information on it?

The only way to know for sure if your local animal care facilities have the ability to read the microchip implanted in your pet is to call them. Visit www.pets911.com, or check your local listings to find your local shelter.

My animal has not yet been microchipped. If I purchase one, how do I know if my local shelter will be able to read the information on it?

This is the responsibility of the business or group providing the microchip. Ask whether the chip being implanted in your pet is compatible with the readers in place in your community. If there is any question, call your local animal shelter to be sure.

What do I do if my local animal care facility cannot read the chip that is implanted in my pet?

Call the microchip manufacturer and ask that they send at least one scanner to your local facilities free of charge.

Why isn't there a scanner that can read all the different types of microchips?

Prior to late 2003, there was a universal scanner that could read all the chips in use in the United States. However, in late 2003, companies began selling chips with a new technology that could not be read by the previous universal scanner. To date, no microchip manufacturer has provided a truly "universal" scanner to read all currently available microchips. The technology to do this is available; the various companies manufacturing microchips must agree to share their technology to make this a reality.

What is The HSUS doing to help?

The HSUS has appealed to the microchip manufacturers to develop or modify existing scanners to make them capable of detecting all microchips, regardless of brand. The HSUS will continue to monitor the situation and assist in developing a long-term solution.

Given the present issues surrounding microchipping, should I microchip my pet?

Yes, microchipping provides an important safety net for your pet. However, before having a chip implanted, talk to your local shelter and/or animal control agency to make sure the type of microchip your vet is implanting can be read by the scanner being used by your local shelter.

How long do microchips last? Do they ever need to be replaced?

Microchips are designed to last the lifetime of a pet—a chip typically lasts at least 25 years. Chips do not need replacing. Once the microchip is implanted, it will remain there and active for the life of the pet.

What else can I do to ensure that my pet will be returned should he or she become lost?

All pets should wear identification tags at all times. Tags should include a local contact number, as well as a number for a friend or out-of-town relative. Proper identification tags are your pet's first ticket home if he becomes lost. Microchips provide an important extra level of protection in the event your pet becomes separated from his collar and tags. Providing your pet with both tags and a microchip can help ensure a happy reunion if the unthinkable happens: your beloved pet gets lost.

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