**With Tri-County Humane Society**

**Q: What is a microchip? How big is it and how does it work?**

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

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

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

**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 animal back if it becomes lost or stolen.

**Q: How does a microchip help reunite a lost animal with its owner?**

A: When an animal is found and taken to a shelter (like TCHS), animal control, or veterinary clinic, one of the first things the staff does is scan the animal for a microchip. If they find a microchip, and if the microchip registry has accurate information, they can quickly find the animal's owner.

**Q: What kind of information is contained in the microchip? Is there a tracking device in it? Will it store my pet's medical information?**

A: The microchips presently used in pets only contain identification numbers. The microchip is **not** a GPS device and cannot track your animal if it gets lost. Although the microchip itself does not contain your pet's medical information, some microchip registration databases will allow you to store that information in the database for quick reference.

**Q: Should I be concerned about my privacy if my pet is microchipped?**

A: No. You don't need to be concerned about your privacy. The information you provide to the manufacturer's microchip registry will be used to contact you in the event your pet is found, and its microchip is scanned. In most cases, you can choose to opt in or opt out of other communications (such as newsletters or advertisements) from the manufacturer. The only information about you in the database is the information that you choose to provide when you register the chip or update your information. There are protections in place so that a random person can't just look up an owner's identification.

If that information is missing or incorrect, your chances of getting your pet back are dramatically reduced.

**Q: Will a microchip really make it more likely for me to get my pet back if it is lost?**

A: Definitely! In fact, a study of more than 7,700 stray animals at animal shelters in 23 states showed that microchipped animals are far more likely to be returned to their owners. In that study, microchipped stray dogs were returned to their owners at more than double the overall rate for all stray dogs. For stray cats, the difference in return rates was even more dramatic.

For microchipped animals that weren't returned to their owners, the most common reason was an incorrect or disconnected owner telephone number in the microchip registry database. So don't forget to keep your contact information 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 a collar with up-to-date identification tags. If a pet is wearing a collar with tags when it's lost, it's often a very quick process to read the tag and contact the owner—if the information on the tag is accurate. But if a pet is not wearing a collar and tags, or if the collar is lost or removed, then the presence of a microchip might be the only way the pet's owner can be found.

Your pet's rabies tag should always be on its collar, so people can quickly see that your pet has been vaccinated for this deadly disease. Rabies tag numbers also allow tracing of animals and identification of a lost animal's owner, but it can be hard to have a rabies number traced after veterinary clinics or county offices are closed for the day. The microchip databases are online or accessed by telephone and are available 24/7/365.

**Q: I just adopted a pet from TCHS. Is it microchipped? How can I find out?**

A: TCHS implants a microchip into every dog and cat they adopt out, and when you complete their adoption process, your contact information is automatically attached to your new pet’s microchip. If you want to be sure of this, check with the microchip company to ensure your information is correct. If you need your pet’s microchip number, call TCHS to find that information.

TCHS implants microchips from the company **24PetWatch**. For more information, visit their website: [**https://www.24petwatch.com/**](https://www.24petwatch.com/)or call **1-866-375-7387**

Most veterinary clinics have microchip scanners, and your veterinarian can scan your new pet for a microchip when you take your pet for its veterinary checkup too. Microchips show up on X-rays, so that's another way to confirm.

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

A: TCHS offers microchipping for only **$20** plus tax, and it only takes a quick phone call to schedule an appointment for this. They occasionally host microchip clinics as well, where they are offered for free!

Most veterinary clinics are also able to microchip your pet. So, it's likely that your pet can be implanted with a microchip the same day as your appointment.

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

A: It may look like a simple enough procedure to implant a microchip, but it's very important that the microchip is implanted properly. Using too much force, placing the needle too deeply, or placing it in the wrong location can not only make it difficult to detect or read the microchip in the future, but can also cause life-threatening problems. Microchips should really be implanted under supervision by a veterinary professional. They know where the microchips should be placed, how to place them, and how to recognize the signs of a problem if it occurs.

**Q: Once the microchip has been implanted, do I need to monitor my pet?**

A: Complications with microchipping are rare. Follow the shelter or veterinarian’s instructions for monitoring your pet after it has been microchipped. If you notice any abnormalities at the site where the microchip was implanted, such as drainage or swelling, contact your veterinarian.

**Q: What should I do to "maintain" my pet's microchip?**

A: Once your pet is microchipped, there are only three things you need to do:

1. **Make sure the microchip is registered.**
2. **Ask your veterinarian to scan your pet's microchip at least once a year to make sure the microchip is still functioning and can be detected.**
3. **Keep your registration information up to date.**

If you've moved, or if any of your information (especially your phone number or address) has changed, make sure you update your microchip registration in the manufacturer's database as soon as possible.

August 15 is designated as Check the Chip Day each year, and that’s the perfect time to take a few minutes to check your pet’s microchip registration information and update it if necessary. TCHS can check your pet’s microchip any time during our open hours, no appointment necessary.

**Q: Why are microchips sometimes not found?**

A: As with almost anything, it's not a foolproof system. Although it's very rare, microchips can fail and become undetectable by a scanner. Problems with the scanners can also occur, though they’re not common. Human error, such as improper scanning technique or incomplete scanning of an animal, can also lead to failure to detect a microchip.

There are animal-related factors that can make it difficult to detect a microchip too, including animals that won't stay still while being scanned; the presence of long, matted hair at or near the microchip site; excessive fat deposits in the area where the chip is implanted; and a metal collar or a collar with a lot of metal on it. All of these can interfere with the scanning and detection of the microchip.

**Q: My pet has two microchips implanted. Do I need to have one removed?**

A: No. You don’t need to have one of the microchips removed, and the two will not interfere with each other. A universal microchip scanner will likely detect both chips if it’s reset after finding the first one.

If you know your pet has more than one microchip implanted, make sure you keep the database information updated for each microchip. That way, you can be contacted, and your pet will be returned to you no matter which microchip is detected.

**Q: Is there one central database that registers the microchip information and makes it available to animal shelters and veterinary clinics in case my pet is lost or stolen?**

A: There isn’t a central database for registering microchips in the U.S. Each manufacturer keeps its own database. Fortunately, when microchip scanners display a microchip’s number, that can be used to identify the chip's manufacturer. This makes it unlikely that an animal can’t be identified from its microchip number—unless the pet's microchip hasn’t been registered or the owner’s contact information is incomplete or inaccurate.

Also, the American Animal Hospital Association’s universal microchip lookup tool allows someone to enter a pet’s microchip number to find out what manufacturer(s) to contact about that microchip. The tool does not provide owner information for the microchip—the user has to contact the manufacturer/database associated with the chip.

**Q: What are some of the problems associated with microchips? How common are they?**

A: Adverse reactions to microchips are uncommon, but they do happen. The most common one is migration of the microchip from its original implantation site. Other issues include failure of the microchip, and hair loss, infection, swelling or tumor formation near the implantation site. More serious problems, and even life-threatening ones, can occur if a chip isn't implanted properly, so it's important to have a veterinary professional perform the microchipping.

**Q: Do the benefits of microchipping outweigh the risks?**

A: Yes. The benefits of microchipping animals far outweigh the risks. Although there’s no guarantee that a shelter or veterinary clinic will be able to read every microchip, the risk that a chip won’t be read is very low and getting even lower. Animal shelters and veterinary clinics are very aware of the consequences of missing an implanted microchip and take extra measures to determine if a microchip is present. Universal scanners are becoming more available as well.

Source Cited:

“Microchipping FAQ.” *American Veterinary Medical Association*, 2023, www.avma.org/resources-tools/pet-owners/petcare/microchips-reunite-pets-families/microchipping-faq.