

# Microchipping – permanent ID for pets

SQPs are in a unique ‘front line’ position with pet owners, says **Lucy Rivett** BVSc MRCVS, Summerhill Veterinary Centre, who explains here how microchips work

Microchipping is a permanent form of identification for pets that was introduced in 1989. Microchips are similar in size to large grains of rice, and are inserted under the skin.

The chips are made of inert material, so they aren't rejected by the animal's body and have a special design to prevent movement. Once in place they will remain functional for the length of the animal's life.

## RADIO FREQUENCY

Microchips are based on radio frequency technology, and the chips themselves have no power. When a scanner is passed over the

pet's skin it produces low frequency radio waves that passively activate the microchip allowing its number to be read. Most chips only contain a unique (usually 16-digit) number, although some brands are able to measure the pet's temperature as well.

The convention for dogs and cats is to insert the chip just between the shoulder blades. Horses have their chips implanted on the left hand side of their necks halfway between their poll and their withers.

Other species have specific sites that are recommended, and a vet will be able to advise you. Specially designed

**Microchips are usually inserted by veterinary surgeons, but lay people can also be trained**

implanting devices are used to inject the microchip through a sterile needle.

Although these needles are wider than the needles commonly used for vaccinations, most pets don't react.

Once the chip is in place it

is advisable to have it scanned regularly (for example at the pet's annual health check), to ensure it is functioning well. The cost of having a microchip implanted varies around the country but is typically between £20 and £30.

Once a pet is chipped the owners have to register their details (address and contact telephone numbers) with the microchip manufacturers. It is very important that pet owners keep their details up to date.

## HEALTH SCHEMES

Microchips are also an essential part of the Pet Travel Scheme. As the UK is a rabies-free island, it is of

paramount importance to keep it that way. Therefore any animal that travels into the UK under the travel scheme must be vaccinated against rabies and by having a microchip the animal can be individually identified and its vaccination record checked.

## SQPS AND MICROCHIPS

One of your roles as an SQP is to advise the general public on prevention and control of disease, part of responsible pet ownership. Microchipping is also part of responsible pet ownership, and so it would be valuable for all SQPs to be familiar with the details in this article.