

The Importance of Microchipping

An Interview with Dr. Kimberly May



Kimberly May, DVM, MS, is Department Director of Communications in AVMA's Marketing and Communications Division. In this interview, she describes the current technology and highlights the importance of microchipping pets. Prior to joining the AVMA in 2005, Dr. May worked in private and referral practices. She received her DVM and completed a residency from Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine, where she also spent a year as a clinical instructor in large animal surgery. Dr. May spends her free time with Rugby the mutt, Crackerjack the mule (best known for her peppermint addiction), and Ricki the quarter horse.

What is the best way for veterinarians to begin productive conversations with clients about the importance of microchipping pets?

I'd start by focusing on the fact that owners love and value their pets. A microchip is one of the best ways to ensure that lost pets will be returned to their owners. Veterinary professionals should emphasize that while collars with up-to-date ID tags help clients get their pets back, collars and tags can be easily removed or lost, so the microchip may make the difference when it comes to finding lost animals. Veterinary staff should point out to clients the countless stories of pets being reunited with their families due to a microchip, despite long distances and even years after the families had given up on finding their beloved pets.

Currently, there are several types of microchips and readers. Why is it important for the ISO standard to be used?

Microchips are internationally regulated by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO, iso.org). The biggest advantage to ISO compliance is that all of the chips emit the same frequency, leaving less risk of using a scanner that can't detect the microchip. The United States doesn't currently require that all chips are ISO compliant, so it is not safe to assume that a U.S. chip is compliant (especially older chips). Check the chip's frequency with the manufacturer if you have any questions. If a pet travels internationally, an ISO-compliant microchip is critical because ISO chips are required for entry into many countries (particularly in Europe).

In the U.S., it is critical that scanners are able to adequately read the full range of frequencies used, or a microchip could be missed. Fortunately, the scanners *currently* sold on the market are capable of reading all frequencies. If a veterinary professional has concerns that the clinic's scanner isn't capable of reading the full range of frequencies, check with the manufacturer. Replace the scanner if it's not working properly or if it cannot read the frequency range needed to detect all chips.

Is a national microchip standard or central database being developed for the U.S., and how soon might it be implemented?

The American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) has a central database, the Universal Pet Microchip Lookup (petmicrochiplookup.org), in which the majority but not all microchip manufacturers and voluntary databases participate. The AAHA database is the one most commonly used by veterinarians to track microchips. Despite occasional efforts to set a national microchip standard, none currently exists.

What is the best way to utilize microchipping registration to allow pets the best chance to be reunited with their owners?

I strongly suggest that at the time of microchipping—before the client leaves the office—clinic staff should ensure that the client registers the pet's microchip with the manufacturer's database. Too many microchips go unregistered, rendering them useless. Clients should be reminded every year to check their pets' microchip information and keep it up to date. This could be done at the pet's regular wellness exams, or as a yearly email or mail reminder in association with Check the Chip Day on August 15 (avma.org/Events/pethealth/Pages/Check-the-Chip-Day.aspx). If the pet is microchipped with a chip from a manufacturer that does not participate in the AAHA database, I encourage the client to also register the microchip with a participating voluntary database (see petmicrochiplookup.org/participating_companies.aspx). In addition, if a client contacts your clinic to update his or her contact information, remind the client to update the pet's microchip registration at that time.

How have you grown more personally aware of the importance of microchipping?

We actively monitor the news for topics relevant to veterinary medicine, and among those is microchipping. Recently, I've been seeing more stories of pets that were lost or stolen but—thanks only to a microchip—were reunited with their families years later, and sometimes when they are more than a thousand miles apart. I love my pets and want to keep them safe. For me, microchipping is a no-brainer when it comes to making sure I get my pet back if he or she is lost or stolen (even my horse and mule are microchipped!).