

Dear Dr. Wise,

Question: Do you recommend that we have a microchip implanted in our family's dog?

Answer: All pet cats and dogs should have a microchip implanted, as this greatly increases the likelihood of their return in the event they are lost or stolen. Without a microchip, lost dogs are returned to their owners in only 13% of cases. With a microchip, this number rises to 74%, even returning dogs found 1000 miles away from home.

A microchip is an electronic chip that is placed beneath your dog's skin with a needle, usually between the shoulder blades. It is very small, and you may not even be able to feel it. No electricity or batteries are used in the chip; it reacts to signal sent from a scanner and simply reads back the numbers on the chip. No other information is contained in the chip, and it cannot be used to track your pet.

Implantation can be done quickly and safely by your veterinarian during a regular visit, and requires no anesthesia and is not a surgery. It is one of the least painful methods of permanent identification of animals, and usually results in only short-term pain and inflammation. While the procedure is simple, complications can still occur if it is implanted incorrectly, so it's important that it be done only under the supervision of a licensed veterinarian.

Once implanted, it is important that you register your dog's information in the microchip company's database, including keeping the contact information for your family updated. The most common reason shelters are unable to return microchipped animals to their owner is outdated or incorrect registry information.

In addition to the microchip, all animals should wear a collar with identification and rabies tags. A microchip serves as a permanent method of identification that the animal cannot lose, but, if present, tags will usually result in a quicker return of your pet.