



CANADIAN VETERINARY
MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

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DES MÉDECINS VÉTÉRINAIRES

Pet Identification Made Easy

You are right to be concerned about proper identification should your dog become lost – something that applies to all pets. Nothing brings such a rush of angst more than the disappearance of a loved pet. With proper identification you can greatly increase the chance your pet will be returned to you. Let's take a moment to briefly summarize the strengths and weaknesses of the various pet identification methods available so that you can make an informed decision as to which one you plan to use.

An effective method of pet identification, called electronic pet identification or microchipping, is rapidly gaining popularity. It involves the injection, using a standard hypodermic needle, of a small identification "chip", about the size of a grain of rice, under the skin of your pet's upper back. Humane societies, municipal animal control offices, and most veterinary clinics have scanners, much like bar code readers used in retail stores, which can be passed over the animal and pick up the implanted microchip. Owner identification is quickly made by accessing a central computer data bank available 7 days a week, 24 hours a day. Recently, many municipalities have moved to incorporate microchipping into their licensing program, often offering savings over the more conventional tag approach, especially if your pet is also neutered. This method avoids all of the pitfalls associated with the previous two identification methods, however does have one disadvantage – the microchip is not visible so a scanner must be used to identify the pet. To overcome this, most microchip manufacturers will provide the pet owner with a tag that lets the individual finding your pet know that the animal has a microchip.

A simple method of pet identification is the dog/cat tag. This can be a municipal license, a rabies tag, or a personalized tag. The strengths are that this method is relatively inexpensive and is quick and easy to implement. However, the weaknesses limit its usefulness. As the tags are attached to your pet's collar, they are often lost or can be easily removed giving no permanent means of identification. Also, with municipal or rabies tags, the specific owner must be retrieved through city hall or the veterinary clinic involved and this may not be possible for hours or even days, preventing a quick owner/pet reunion. Another concern is that this information is regional and may, therefore, not be easy to access if your pet is lost away from home. This may be avoided, to some degree, by personalized tags.

A third method of pet identification is by means of a tattoo applied either to the inside of your pet's ear flap or on the inner thigh region. This is generally used in purebred dogs for Canadian Kennel Club registration. This method's strength lies in the fact that it is a permanent means of identification. The weaknesses are defined by several points. First, tattooing is a moderately painful procedure that often necessitates an anesthetic to perform. Second, tattoos often become faded or distorted with age, making it illegible. Finally, the same potential delay in information retrieval exists as with tags.

Regardless of their individual strengths and weaknesses, using as many means of pet identification as possible will improve your chances of having your pet returned should he become lost. As a minimum, I would suggest the use of both a microchip as well as a form of dog tag. On a final note, don't forget the best prevention against a lost pet – a collar and leash!

For more animal health information, visit the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association's website for pet owners www.animalhealthcare.ca

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