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A BREEDERS GUIDE TO MICROCHIPPING PUPPIES

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MICROCHIPPING PUPPIES

The new rules which come into force in the UK on April 6, 2016, will make it illegal for anyone to sell a puppy without first having the puppy microchipped and will require the breeder to enter his/her details as well as details of the puppy onto an approved database. Breeders who fail to comply with this legislation may be given a compliance notice allowing them an additional 21 days to have the puppies microchipped or pay a fine. Although Veterinary surgeons are not expected to enforce the regulations, they may report the matter to an enforcement officer.

Certain details will be recorded on the database, such as:

- The full name and address of the keeper will be recorded, and the keeper at the time of microchipping will now be the breeder.
- The fact that the keeper is also the breeder must be stated. For the purposes of this legislation, the keeper is the owner of the bitch who had the puppies.
- If the keeper is the breeder and is licensed by Local Authority under the Breeding of Dogs and sale (Welfare) Act 1999 (England, Scotland and Wales). Those breeders who breed five or more litters of puppies in a year may need to be licensed; however, breeders may still be classified as being commercial breeders if they breed fewer than five litters a year. Do contact your Local Authority for details, as these may be different for each area.
- The breeder's license number and the name of the Local Authority by which he/she is licensed.
- The original name or identification number given to the dog; this may be the Kennel Club registration's name and number or other such scheme.
- The contact telephone number (if any) for the keeper/breeder.
- The name given to the dog by the keeper, if that is different from the details recorded.
- The sex of the dog, breed of the dog- or description it's a cross breed (cross breeds will include labradoodles, cockerpoos etc.)
- The colour of the dog.
- The most accurate estimate of the dog's date of birth.

Following the sale of the new puppy to a new caregiver, the new owner must apply to whichever microchipping registration service has been used by the breeder and amend contact details to their own.

Guidance for breeders.



The following behavioural guidance is aimed at those breeders who have never microchipped their puppies before they left for their new home, or those breeders (myself included) who microchipped puppies later than 8 weeks, but before they left for their new homes. Traditionally, responsible breeders of larger breeds of dogs or working dogs have tended to re-home their puppies between 7-9 weeks of age, while responsible breeders of small/toy breeds have tended to re-home their puppies between 9-12 weeks of age. My own puppies are generally with me until they are fully vaccinated and microchipped and leave me when they are no less than 11 weeks of age. I do this because before they are vaccinated or microchipped, I want to prepare the puppy for what may be a traumatic or painful experience, by establishing a broad set of maintenance stimuli (or trust account) of positive experiences. I fully understand that it is not always possible for breeders, and especially those breeders of large breeds or large litters, to hold onto their puppies after 7-8 weeks of age.

This new legislation does not specify a minimum age at which a puppy can be microchipped, and this may be because there is no legal minimum age at which a puppy can be sold in the UK. However, the Kennel Club Assured Breeders' scheme does stipulate that no puppy may be sold prior to 6 weeks of age, and thus they recommend that no puppy should be microchipped before it is 6 weeks old.

What is the optimum age for the procedure to be carried out?

Many breeders are aware of the current research on puppy development and the importance of establishing good social and environmental referencing while the puppies are with them; they are further aware that social and environmental referencing does not begin when the puppy leaves for his new home, but it begins while the puppy is in the womb and continues. Puppies aged less than 5 weeks of age are more accepting of new experiences delivered in a positive manner and less worried by potentially stressful or painful experiences. The puppy's brain is in a state of "parasympathetic dominance," or rather his fight or flight response has not set in. When the puppy is approximately 5 weeks of age, care should be taken when exposing the puppy to a new experience, as he may become frightened. And, if he has not had enough positive experiences beforehand, this may have a lasting effect upon his behaviour. When revisiting this research, I was struck by one important point and that is: development in puppies is fluid and not rigid, often quoted ages are an approximation, and we have to be aware that there are both breed and individual differences. It can be difficult to identify when our litter of puppies is in a state of parasympathetic dominance or not. Thus, it is almost impossible to quote an actual figure for when this should be done.

Even if we were to accurately pinpoint when our puppies had entered into "flight or fight" mode, we have to consider the procedure itself and the effect that this may have on a puppy's overall health and well being. The following points are worthy of note:

- The majority of companies offer mini-microchips for use in small/toy dogs, which had been used in working spaniels, microchipped- at the time of, or just before, legal tail docking in England. This procedure took place when those puppies were a few days old and, generally, it was a vet who docked and microchipped at the same time. Thus, if there were issues with the insertion of the microchip, excessive bleeding, haematoma, or infection, vets were on hand to assist.
- The microchip companies that I contacted reported that while they could see no reason why small microchips could not be used on other breeds of dogs before they were 5 weeks of age, they had no knowledge that it has actually been done; without exception, they suggested that if I had any concerns, the procedure should be carried out by a vet in case there might be adverse reactions to the procedure.
- The law as it stands allows for a broad range of people to carry out this procedure, some of whom may not be suitably experienced with small puppies 5 weeks old or less.
- DEFRA recommends that puppies should be microchipped after the age of 6 weeks.
- Fellow responsible breeders from other countries, where microchipping puppies has been mandatory for some time, all report no issue with microchipping puppies at 7-8 weeks of age; they have followed similar protocols to ours, maintaining maintenance sets, and setting up lots of positive experiences that may be associated with the procedure. Those same breeders have reported some issues when microchipping puppies under the age of 6 weeks of age, which they have had to do when dual parentage (the puppies have been sired by more than one dog) issues were extant.

Thus, when reviewing my research and weighing up the costs and benefits, I concluded that it was better to give the puppy a set of positive experiences to prepare for the microchipping procedure at 7-8 weeks of age and to ensure that this procedure was done with the puppy's maintenance set which would include me, the Dam, littermates, etc.



Preparing a litter of puppies for microchipping at 7-8 weeks of age.

It is important to set up as many positive experiences as possible, both before and after 5 weeks of age.

Handling

Before the age of 2 weeks, the puppies will obviously be handled a great deal by their breeder who checks on them to ensure that all is well with the litter. This gentle handling should continue throughout the period that the puppies are with their breeder; once the puppies are more robust, trusted individuals can be used so that the puppies are exposed to a range of people gently handling them.

When the puppies are 4 weeks of age and beyond, try to give each puppy individual time with you away from his Dam and littermates, to encourage independence; further handling exercises can be introduced as you name and touch each part of his body, using small treats as rewards. To teach the puppy to be gently restrained from 3-4 weeks of age, sit on the floor beside the puppy and hold it by your side for 3 seconds as you feed him a treat. Once he has finished the treat, release him. Also, increase the time of restraint gradually over the following weeks.

From 5-6 weeks of age, the puppies can be taught to be examined on a table. To begin with, have a low table with a non-slip car mat on top. Gently and slowly pick the puppy up and allow him to eat some food from the table. When the food is finished, pick him up and slowly place him on the ground. As the puppy begins to associate being picked up with the table and food, you can begin to practice both restraint and handling exercises on the table. Never force the puppy to stay on the table longer than he can cope with.

Habituation.



This process begins at approximately 3 weeks of age, and begins with exposure to normal household noises. Puppies bred in a house will have an advantage here, but there are CDs of noises that one can purchase and play to kennelled puppies. These needn't be played loudly or for a long period of time. As you want the puppies to notice the sounds and then ignore them, make noise or play sound CDs at odd times of the day and evening when the puppies are awake. If you notice that a puppy is worried, or takes time to recover from hearing that sound, then make a note of which sound worried the puppy and expose him to that sound, at a lower level, when he is doing something pleasurable such as eating.

- Exposure to new surfaces can be introduced when the puppies begin to find their feet, which may be around 4 weeks of age; vet bed, artificial grass, carpet, wooden floor can all be placed within the puppy pen.
- Adding novel toys or a play gym will encourage curiosity and inquisitive behaviours, and a range of items such as pieces of cloth, plant pots, play tunnels, boxes, etc., may be added to the puppy pen.
- By feeding them individually inside a crate, puppies from 5-6 weeks of age can be taught that crates are a fun place to be. To begin with, the door is left open to allow them to come out of the crate; and, eventually, the door may be closed for increasing periods of time. The crate will be used as a means of transporting the puppies to the vets for microchipping.
- Once puppies are familiar with their crate, they may be exposed to car journeys. Pop the puppy into his crate with a stuffed puppy KONG or some treats and lift the crate gently and slowly into the car; once the puppy is happy with this. then start the engine, building up to a short drive.
- Once the puppies are used to short drives in the car, they may be taken to other locations so that they are exposed to a range of people and situations, including short trips to the vets (check first with your surgeon, to ensure he/she has no reason to be concerned by your puppy's visit.)
- Collar familiarization can begin when the puppies are 5-6 weeks of age. Therefore, try to use different coloured or patterned collars for each puppy, as this will aid identification later, especially when all of the puppies in the litter look similar or have similar markings. To begin with, gently attach the collar and offer the puppy a treat of stuffed Kong or food from his bowl; remove the collar after a few seconds and gradually build up the time that the collar is fitted. So, that by the time the puppy is 7 weeks of age, he will tolerate the wearing of a collar when he is supervised.



Puppy trip to the vet for microchipping.

Please be aware that there are both genetic and breed differences between individual puppies; and, if a puppy looks worried, it is wise to go back a few steps. Some breeders will choose to do the microchipping themselves, some will invite an experienced microchipper into their homes and breeding establishments; other breeders will choose to go to the vet for the procedure. No matter who microchips the puppy, by following these simple suggestions, you will help prepare your puppies for the trip to the vet for microchipping and for that journey to their new homes and for life.

For those breeders who will be taking their puppies to the vets for the microchipping procedure, it would be useful to include what behaviourists often refer to as the puppies' "maintenance set" or, in other words, include the things that make the puppies feel safe; these will include their familiar crate, blanket, litter mates, ands Dam. Once at the veterinary surgery, pop the crate of puppies into a cleaned room or onto a suitable surface that is not on the ground. Do have your paper work ready for the vet to see before removing a puppy from the crate; once a puppy is removed from the crate, lift him up onto the table- making sure that the table is non-slip and allow the puppy to eat while the procedure is being carried out. Once done, the puppy can be identified with his collar and returned to the crate with his siblings and Dam.

If your puppies experience some swelling after the procedure has been completed, your vet will be able to advise on this and any other concerns that you may have following the procedure.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

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