

## **ADVICE NOTE 16**

### **THE REMOVAL OF DEW CLAWS**

#### **Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966**

1. The removal of dew claws amounts to the practice of veterinary surgery and therefore can, as a general rule, only be carried out by a veterinary surgeon. Schedule 3 to the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966, however, allows anyone of or over the age of 18 to amputate the dew claws of a dog, before its eyes are open.
2. The Veterinary Surgeons Act applies to the United Kingdom (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland).

#### **Animal Welfare Legislation**

3. In England, Scotland and Wales the animal welfare legislation prohibits the mutilation of animals, but subject to certain exceptions laid down in regulations.

#### **Animal Welfare Act 2006**

4. In England, Schedules 1 and 9 to the Mutilations (Permitted Procedures) (England) Regulations 2007 (SI 2007/1100) state that the removal of dew claws is a permitted procedure with the condition that 'an anaesthetic must be administered except where the dog is a puppy whose eyes have not yet opened'.
5. In Wales, Schedules 1 and 9 to the Mutilations (Permitted Procedures) (Wales) Regulations 2007 (SI 2007/1029) state that the removal of dew claws is a permitted procedure with the condition that 'an anaesthetic must be administered except where the dog is a puppy whose eyes have not yet opened'.

#### **Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006**

6. In Scotland, Schedule 9 of the Prohibited Procedures on Protected Animals (Exemptions) (Scotland) Regulations 2007 (SI 2007/256) states that the amputation of dew claws is an exempted procedure and may be carried out for the purpose of general animal management. The Protection of Animals (Anaesthetic) Act 1954 continues to apply in Scotland and provides that anaesthetic must be administered except for 'the amputation of the dew claws of a dog before its eyes are open'.

## **What are a dog's dew claws?**

7. Colloquially, dew claw refers to the first digit on the hind limb and the first digit on the fore limb.
8. Anatomically, the dew claw is defined as the first digit of the hind limb. Dew claws (hind limb) are very variable in their occurrence, ranging from complete absence to a fully formed digit with skeletal components; most consist of a nail, skin and connective tissue with no skeletal articulation. Such a vestigial structure is certainly very vulnerable to damage through catching on vegetation; therefore, there is a good argument for removal of dew claws before five days of age.
9. Anatomically, the first digit of the fore limb is not a dew claw. Generally, the first digit of the fore limb is fully formed and has an important function. Not surprisingly dogs are often seen to use these ' thumbs ' exactly as you would expect – to help grasp food and other objects. Generally, the first digits of the fore limb rarely 'get caught' because they can be adducted, flexed or extended like any other digit, due to the bony articulation and the muscle attachments.
10. Legislation has not defined dew claws and ultimately, it is for the courts to decide the meaning of dew claws applying to any specific legislation.

## **Conclusion**

11. The removal of the first digit of the hind limb (true dew claws) is justified in most circumstances.
12. The removal of first digit of the fore limb is justified only if, in the veterinary surgeon's professional opinion, the particular anatomy/appearance of the digits invites possible damage.

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