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## Medically Unnecessary Surgical Procedures, Frequently Asked Questions <sup>[1]</sup>



### Q: Why have Alberta veterinarians voted to stop performing medically unnecessary procedures?

**A:** There is no scientific evidence that these unnecessary medical/surgical procedures provide any welfare or medical benefit to animals. There is evidence to suggest that some of the procedures cause acute and chronic pain, as well as behavioural evidence that unnecessary alteration may be detrimental to canine and feline behaviour.

Currently in a majority of Canadian provinces, veterinarians are prohibited from performing various medically unnecessary surgeries through provincial veterinary association by-laws and codes of practice — this includes NL, PEI, NS, NB, MB, SK and BC. Additionally, cosmetic surgery is illegal under the provincial Animal Health and Protection Act in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Status in July 2019, “X” signifies procedure not allowed to be performed in that province:

Province	Ear Cropping	Tail Docking	Cat Declaw
British Columbia	X	X	X
Alberta	X	X	X
Saskatchewan	X		
Manitoba	X		X
Ontario			
Quebec	X	X	X
New Brunswick			X
Nova Scotia	X	X	X
Prince Edward Island	X	X	X

Newfoundland/Labrador	X	X	
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For more information on why these procedures have been banned, [go here](#) [2].

## Q: What should I do if I see pet owners whose animals have clearly undergone a medically unnecessary medical procedure?

**A:** Change is hard. Be kind to your neighbor, coworker and folks at the dog park. If they have a 10-year-old dog with cropped ears and a docked tail, don't be harsh about a decision they might've made 10 years ago. Social change takes time and gaining public support is better done through respect and understanding than confrontation.

## Q: What does the ABVMA policy on Medically Unnecessary Procedures mean for breeders and pure-bred dogs? Will people stop breeding and buying animals who, historically, were subject to procedures such as tail docking and ear cropping as part of the breed standard?

**A:** Tail docking and ear cropping are not required to meet Canadian Kennel Club breed standards. These procedures are allowed but not required. Conformation judges and breeders are accustomed to seeing breeds look a certain way. In some countries, dogs with ear crops and tail docks are not allowed in the show ring. North America has been slow to change.

Some dog breeders are concerned about discrimination against purebred dogs. Many veterinarians and RVTs own and breed animals and understand the concern. The decision of Alberta veterinarians to not perform unnecessary medical procedures should not impact your decision to purchase a purebred pup. Ask for the puppy to be left the way it was born with tail, ears and front dewclaws.

The decision to discontinue unnecessary medical procedures focuses on animal welfare. It is not a decision against animal breeders. We encourage purchasing dogs from within Canada and support caution when [importing dogs](#) [3] from outside of Canada. We encourage diversity and maintenance of dog breeds. We commend the Canadian Kennel Club for their involvement in preserving dog breeds through the International Partnership for Dogs ([www.dogwellnet.com](http://www.dogwellnet.com) [4]) and the Harmonization Project (<https://dogwellnet.com/ctp/> [5])

## Q: If a puppy with a docked tail or cropped ears is presented to a veterinarian, will the puppy buyer or breeder be investigated?

**A:** If the puppy is young enough that the surgery would have been done after July 1, 2019, the veterinarian will likely ask where and when the surgery was performed.

Veterinarians in Alberta have an obligation to not perform the surgery. Surgery done by laypeople will not provide anesthesia and pain control. Lay people in Alberta performing the surgery may be reported to a peace officer with an appointment under the Animal Protection Act. The word 'may' is intentional because the circumstances in each case will dictate whether it will be reported.

## Q: What happens if I buy a dog from another province or country, that has cropped ears and/or docked tail, and bring it into Alberta?

The ABVMA policy on Unnecessary Medical Procedures applies to Alberta veterinarians. Veterinarians who encounter dogs with cropped ears and docked tail will likely have questions. The objective is to assure that surgeries are being performed appropriately ensuring animal welfare.

## **Q: What if my dog had its tail removed for a medically necessary reason—will I be scrutinized by my veterinarian?**

**A:** Generally speaking, no. Assuming your veterinarian or registered veterinary technologist has access to your pet's medical history, the reason for the tail removal will be evident. There might be some instances where you will be asked questions in the absence of access to your pet's medical history, but there are legitimate reasons for a medically necessary tail removal, which is not the same as docking.

## **Q: If my puppy has its' tail docked and ears cropped in a province or state that allows veterinarians to perform the surgery, and requires rechecking the surgical sites in Alberta, what will happen?**

**A:** Veterinary professionals are concerned about animal welfare and will treat animal patients as required. A copy of the medical record or a certificate showing that the surgery was performed by a veterinarian in a jurisdiction that allows the surgeries is helpful. These records demonstrate the surgery was done by a registered veterinarian using appropriate anesthesia and pain management. If an individual veterinary practice has no experience with post-operative complications from a recently performed tail dock or ear crop, they are allowed to recommend that the dog is taken to another veterinary practice.

## **Q: I was told that when puppies have their tails docked and front dewclaws removed at 3 – 5 days of age they do not feel pain. Is that true?**

**A:** The idea that tail docking is painless is false. Some people consider tail docking to be a benign procedure based on the fact that most neonatal pups do not cry for long after the procedure, and generally go to sleep fairly soon after, indicating comfort. However, studies in the last 20 years have found neonatal humans, dog and rodent pups do not perceive pain less than adults, rather they have increased pain sensitivity. Research has also shown that neonatal humans and animals often respond to pain and stress with increased feeding and sleeping behaviours. This is thought to be an adaptive mechanism which ensures that the neonate has sufficient nourishment and rest to survive under adverse circumstances, not an indication of comfort. Any surgery performed without anesthesia and pain medication prescribed by a veterinarian causes animal distress.

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**Section:** [Pets](#) <sup>[6]</sup>

**Topics:** [Animal Welfare](#) <sup>[7]</sup>

**Tags:** [ear cropping](#) <sup>[8]</sup>, [tail docking](#) <sup>[9]</sup>, [declawing](#) <sup>[10]</sup>, [surgery](#) <sup>[11]</sup>

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### **Links**

[1] <https://www.albertaanimalhealthsource.ca/content/medically-unnecessary-surgical-procedures-frequently-asked-questions>

[2] <https://www.albertaanimalhealthsource.ca/content/alberta-veterinarians-ban-medically-unnecessary-medical-procedures>

[3] <https://www.albertaanimalhealthsource.ca/content/what-look-animal-shelters>

[4] <http://www.dogwellnet.com/>

[5] <https://dogwellnet.com/ctp/>

[6] <https://www.albertaanimalhealthsource.ca/section/pets>

- [7] <https://www.albertaanimalhealthsource.ca/animal-welfare>
- [8] <https://www.albertaanimalhealthsource.ca/article-tags/ear-cropping>
- [9] <https://www.albertaanimalhealthsource.ca/article-tags/tail-docking>
- [10] <https://www.albertaanimalhealthsource.ca/article-tags/declawing>
- [11] <https://www.albertaanimalhealthsource.ca/article-tags/surgery>



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The Alberta Animal Health Source is an online resource for pet owners, equine enthusiasts, and livestock producers in Alberta and around the world. Commissioned by the [Alberta Veterinary Medical Association](#) (ABVMA), our goal is to offer veterinarian-approved information and advice to animal owners in order to empower them in providing their animals with the healthiest and happiest lives possible. We're always adding new articles and materials, so be sure to check back regularly for all the latest news in animal care.

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