

## Sterilization of Companion Animals

**Position:** The Edmonton Humane Society (EHS) supports the surgical sterilization (gonadectomy) of companion animals to prevent pet overpopulation and related issues.

### Summary

- Sterilization prevents issues related to overpopulation and is associated with health benefits for companion animals.
- EHS supports the early age (pediatric) spaying and neutering of dogs, cats and rabbits in the care of an animal shelter. This allows animal welfare organizations to prevent pet overpopulation and unplanned litters, by ensuring dogs, cats and rabbits are spayed or neutered before adoption.
- EHS believes the health benefits (both at an individual and population level) of sterilization significantly outweigh the risks. EHS encourages pet guardians of intact animals to discuss the most appropriate age for sterilization with their veterinarian.

### Rationale

- The sterilization of companion animals prevents overpopulation issues, such as unplanned litters, euthanasia, abandonment and relinquishment of unwanted companion animals. Sterilization helps to address the root cause of pet overpopulation by spaying and neutering dogs, cats and rabbits by licensed veterinarians.
- Sterilization is associated with health benefits for companion animals, such as:
  - Eliminating the risk of uterine infections (pyometra) and cancer;
  - Neutering eliminates the risk of testicular cancer; and,
  - Sterilization helps to reduce some undesirable behaviours, such as territorial or reproductive behaviours like marking, roaming and aggression.
- Multiple veterinary associations, including The Canadian Veterinary Medical Association and American Veterinary Medical Association, strongly support sterilization of all cats and dogs at animal shelters prior to adoption to prevent ongoing contributions to pet overpopulation issues.
- EHS sterilizes dogs, cats and rabbits prior to adoption. Other species, such as birds, ferrets, rodents and reptiles may not be sterilized prior to adoption. When intact animals are adopted, EHS advises guardians to seek veterinary guidance to prevent unnecessary breeding and learn about behaviours associated with intact animals.
- EHS believes that pediatric sterilization is appropriate when the following qualifications are met:
  - The animal is of adequate age (7 to 16 weeks of age for cats, 8 to 16 weeks of age for dogs, 12 to 16 weeks of age for rabbits);
  - The animal has reached sufficient weight (800g minimum for cats and 1kg minimum for rabbits);
  - The animal is clinically normal and healthy prior to surgery, at the discretion of a licensed veterinarian; and,
  - Proper surgical and evidence-based protocols specific to early aged animals are implemented.

- Several studies performed to evaluate the effects of early age spaying or neutering suggest the procedure is not associated with serious health problems and is medically sound. Early age spaying and neutering also has advantages, such as safe anesthetic and surgical techniques, shorter surgical and recovery times and avoidance of stress associated with spaying while in heat, pregnant or with uterine disease. Industry standards recommend sterilization earlier than normal to decrease overpopulation of animals.
- EHS supports education, policies and programs which promote the sterilization of companion animals, such as:
  - Research regarding nonsurgical sterilization;
  - Research regarding population dynamics, such as defining actual numbers and reproductive patterns in populations;
  - Animal adoption organizations only adopting sterilized animals to the community;
  - Reduced licensing and reclaim fees for sterilized animals;
  - Services which sterilize free-roaming animals such as Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) services; and,
  - Public education campaigns.
- EHS believes spay and neuter services should be accessible to all pet guardians in order to combat overpopulation.
- EHS implements several strategies to address pet overpopulation and promote sterilization, such as:
  - Offering a Prevent Another Litter Subsidy (PALS) program to provide spay and neuter services for low-income pet guardians in the City of Edmonton and surrounding communities;
  - Offering Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) services for feral cats outside of the City of Edmonton;
  - Operating a Mobile PALS Unit to increase the accessibility of spay and neuter services for low-income pet guardians in the City of Edmonton;
  - Sterilizing all dogs, cats and rabbits EHS adopts to the community; and,
  - Developing communication, education and advocacy messaging about the importance and benefits of spaying and neutering pets.

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