

LCQ7: Immigration arrangement for cats and dogs

Following is a question by the Hon Maggie Chan and a written reply by the Secretary for Environment and Ecology, Mr Tse Chin-wan, in the Legislative Council today (June 5):

Question:

Under the Rabies Regulation (Cap. 421A), all dogs over the age of five months must be microchipped, and the pet microchips used in Hong Kong are AVID microchips. On the other hand, it is learnt that currently the Mainland and overseas countries generally recognise ISO pet microchips. Since the formats and the microchip readers of the two types of microchips are different, dogs implanted with ISO microchips entering Hong Kong from abroad must be rechipped with AVID microchips, while dog owners planning to bring dogs to the Mainland must have their dogs implanted with ISO microchips. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) to facilitate dog owners going north to the Mainland or emigrating overseas with their pets, and to promote the internationalisation of Hong Kong's pet microchip standards, whether the Government has plans to amend the relevant regulation for the purpose of switching to ISO microchips in Hong Kong; if so, of the implementation timetable; if not, the reasons for that; and

(2) given that the Government indicated in March this year that it was exploring the feasibility of shortening the present quarantine period of no less than 120 days for cats and dogs imported from some Group III places by measures such as rabies vaccination and rabies antibody titer testing, whether the Government has formulated a specific timetable for the related study; if so, of the latest work progress, and the expected time when the relevant measures will be rolled out; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the question from the Hon Maggie Chan is as follows:

(1) To effectively prevent and control the spread of rabies, since 1996, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) has required all dogs aged over five months to be implanted with AVID microchips as identification under the Rabies Regulation (Cap. 421A). These microchips serve to verify whether a dog is licensed and vaccinated. In the event of a dog getting lost, the microchip can assist the owner in locating their dogs.

The quality and traceability of AVID microchips are well recognised

internationally, and they are used in other countries and regions. If dog owners need to implant their dogs with an additional International Organization for Standardization standard microchip (ISO microchip), it will not affect the health of the dogs.

Considering the widespread use of ISO microchips in the Mainland and many other countries and regions, the AFCD is currently proactively studying the introduction of ISO microchips into Hong Kong and will consult stakeholders, with a view to amending the Rabies Regulation within next year to implement the arrangements.

(2) Rabies is a contagious disease that can cause fatality to mammals (including humans) and its incubation period can last several months. No specific treatment is available and rabies is almost always fatal once clinical signs appear. Nearly 60 000 people die of rabies globally every year.

To safeguard public health, the AFCD must take suitable measures to prevent the transmission of animal diseases including rabies into Hong Kong. The AFCD made reference to information about animal disease surveillance from the World Organisation for Animal Health and currently requires cats and dogs imported from places with a higher or uncertain risk of rabies to be quarantined for at least 120 days. As biotechnology has developed in recent years, the AFCD is exploring the feasibility of shortening the quarantine period for cats and dogs imported from certain places with higher risk of rabies, by measures such as rabies vaccination and rabies antibody titer testing. The study is in its final stage, and we will next explore the implementation details, including discussing arrangements with places concerned, with the aim of rolling out the testing arrangements as soon as possible.