

# Elective Spaying and Neutering of Pets

## Gonadectomy Resources for Veterinarians

In the United States, dogs and cats not intended for breeding are routinely neutered via elective gonadectomy (also referred to as ovariectomy, spay or spaying for females; orchiectomy or castration for males; and neuter or neutering for males or for both sexes). As the risks and benefits of gonadectomy are re-examined, a renewed conversation about if and when to sterilize a pet is emerging among veterinarians. As we learn more about the consequences of these surgeries, veterinarians must also balance the societal benefits with the benefits and risks to individual animals and pet owners.



*Veterinarian and assistant handling a dog.*

## Risks and benefits of spaying and neutering

Gonadectomy achieves sterilization, thereby preventing reproduction, and removes the production source of sexual hormones that may cause undesired mating behaviors in dogs and cats. This benefits society by reducing overpopulation through non-lethal means and mitigating behaviors that may damage the human-animal bond and contribute to abandonment and relinquishment to shelters and other humane organizations.

However, the removal of sex hormones may influence the incidence of a variety of disease processes – increasing some, while reducing others. This has created a challenging environment for companion animal practitioners who want to make the best decision for their patients.

Both the American College of Theriogenologists and the Society for Theriogenology assert that companion animals not intended for breeding should be spayed or neutered, unless contraindicated by the pet's age, breed, sex, intended use, household environment, or temperament. Any potential consequences for an individual animal must also be weighed with the necessity of managing the individual animal and overall breed or species populations.

**For feline patients**, the **AVMA endorses** the consensus document put forth by the **Veterinary Task Force on Feline Sterilization for Age of Spay and Neuter Surgery**, which recommends cats not intended for breeding be gonadectomized by five months of age. The document represents a clear and evidence-based position that promotes individual animal health, contributes to effective population control, and can be communicated clearly to clients. It has broad support among veterinary medical and cat breeding associations, having also been endorsed by the American Association of Feline Practitioners, Association of Shelter Veterinarians, American Animal Hospital Association, Winn Foundation, Catalyst Council, Cat Fancier's Association, and The International Cat Association.

**For canine patients**, due to the varied incidence and severity of disease processes, there is no single recommendation that would be appropriate for all dogs. Developing recommendations for an informed case-by-case assessment requires an evaluation of the risks and benefits of spay/neuter, including its potential effects on neoplasia, orthopedic disease, reproductive disease, behavior, longevity, and population management. However, many factors other than neuter status play an important role in these outcomes, including breed, sex, genetics, lifestyle, and body condition.

The AVMA has developed resources to assist veterinarians in the decision-making process, and will continue to facilitate discussion and dissemination of new developments regarding gonadectomy. Continuing education webinars on gonadectomy are available for on-demand viewing, as well as a literature review on the welfare implications of gonadectomy of dogs, which was published in JAVMA.

- [Continuing Education: Gonadectomy in Dogs and Cats](#)
- [Literature Review: Welfare Implications of Gonadectomy of Dogs](#)

## Client resources

Managing a pet's reproduction is part of **responsible pet ownership**. Share our [Spaying & Neutering client brochure](#) and [pet owners' resource on spaying and neutering](#) with clients to help them make an informed decision.

## Spay/neuter programs

**Low-cost or no-cost spay/neuter programs** are subsidized programs, often run by nonprofit or governmental agencies, designed to reduce pet overpopulation by providing pet sterilization services for owners who otherwise could not afford to have their pet spayed or neutered. Although the surgeries may be performed in higher volume, in mobile clinics, or in MASH-style temporary facilities, **AVMA policy states** that the standards of practice should conform with the [Association of Shelter Veterinarians' Veterinary Medical Care Guidelines for Spay/Neuter Programs](#).

## Early-age/pediatric spay and neuter

**Pediatric spaying and neutering** provides the societal benefit of reducing overpopulation, and is often performed on young, adoptable animals in shelters and humane organizations prior to the animals being placed in new homes. Veterinarians should use their professional judgment to determine the optimal time for sterilization of individual animals. The continuing education webinars linked above can help you better understand the various factors that should be considered in making these decisions.

## Mandatory spay/neuter

While a number of states have proposed **mandatory spay/neuter laws** in recent years, there are currently no state laws requiring all pet owners to sterilize their animals. The **AVMA does not support regulations or legislation mandating spay-neuter** of privately owned, non-shelter dogs and cats.