

Ear Cropping: Never Make Your Puppy Endure This Cruel Procedure, No Matter What

Legal is not the same as ethical and humane. There's no reason any dog should have to endure this agony. Yet it's highly popular, especially in these 18 breeds. Would you allow this to happen to a loved one? Hopefully not ... so don't make your puppy suffer either.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- The Canadian province of British Columbia recently made it against the law to crop a dog's ears for cosmetic purposes
- Ear cropping is the surgical removal of about two-thirds of each ear, followed by several weeks or months of tightly taping the ears into an upright position
- There is no defensible reason to perform the procedure for cosmetic purposes. There are, however, significant risks to the physical and psychological well-being of the dog

Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published January 06, 2016.

The College of Veterinarians in the province of British Columbia in Canada (CVBC) has recently banned the practice of ear cropping on dogs for cosmetic purposes. The procedure involves the surgical removal of two-thirds to three-quarters of a dog's ears, with the goal of making the ears stand straight up.

"This decision by the CVBC to make cosmetic ear cropping an unethical practice of veterinary medicine is a significant step forward in the humane treatment of animals in our province," said Craig Daniell of the British Columbia Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), "and we are extremely pleased to support and endorse this change."¹

Veterinarians practicing in British Columbia who crop ears will now be charged with the unethical practice of veterinary medicine, and will face disciplinary action.

Ear Cropping Explained

Ear cropping is typically done when a puppy is 8 to 10 weeks old. The procedure is performed under general anesthesia. A dog's ears have lots of nerve endings, and the pain this surgery would cause without anesthesia is extreme.

Cropping involves the surgical removal of around two-thirds of the pinna, or floppy part of both ears. The remaining tissue is then tightly taped into an upright position. Pain medication may or may not be given after a cropping procedure.

Over the next several weeks or months, the altered ears will be taped and re-taped in an effort to get them to stand up straight. This process may or may not yield the intended result. Many cropped puppies, even after weeks or months of taping, still have floppy ears.

Cropping can also disfigure the ears, leaving them scarred or bent. In the U.S., the American Kennel Club (AKC) breeds with traditionally cropped ears include:²

- Boxer
- Giant Schnauzer
- Doberman Pinscher
- Brussels Griffon
- Great Dane
- Standard Schnauzer
- Miniature Schnauzer
- Neapolitan Mastiff
- Boston Terrier
- Manchester Terrier
- Cane Corso
- Briard
- Miniature Pinscher
- German Pinscher
- American Staffordshire Terrier
- Affenpinscher
- Bouvier des Flandres
- Beauceron

What's the Reason Behind Cropping a Dog's Ears?

In my opinion and the opinion of many others in the veterinary and animal welfare community, there's absolutely no justifiable reason to mutilate a dog's ears for cosmetic purposes.

Infuriatingly, in some breeds, like the Doberman Pinscher, it's done to make the animal appear more menacing.

Another excuse is that cropping reduces the incidence of ear infections because it provides increased airflow to the ear canal. There is zero scientific evidence to back up this claim, and in my view, it's utter nonsense.

Cropping proponents also argue that most breed standards do not allow for uncropped animals. The AKC, while it has no rules specifically requiring ear cropping, is not likely to score uncropped show dogs of certain breeds highly for conformation.

Standards for certain cropped breeds establish severe penalties for uncropped animals.

The result is that many dog owners who want to show their animals feel pressured into cropping so they can compete in the ring, and the AKC's position on cosmetic procedures to meet breed standards encourages the practice:

*"We recognize ear cropping and tail docking, as prescribed in certain breed standards, are acceptable practices integral to defining and preserving breed character, enhancing good health, and preventing injuries."*³

Is Ear Cropping Harmful to Dogs?

Just as there is a use and purpose for every organ and appendage you were born with, so it is with your dog.

All ear cropping methods cause suffering for the animal, and many dogs go on to experience the phantom pain of a missing appendage much like human amputees do.

The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) lists three welfare concerns-risks with regard to ear cropping:⁴

- **General anesthesia** — Cropping should always be carried out under full anesthesia, which itself has associated risks.
- **Postoperative care** — Dogs will experience some discomfort during healing, stretching, re-taping and bandaging, and other manipulations after surgery.

Some will need their ears bandaged or taped upright for days to months, and they may be isolated from other dogs during this period.

- **Potential complications** — As with any incision, cropped ears may become infected. Cropped ears may also fail to stand or have a distorted shape or position potentially leading to subsequent operations.

The AVMA's position as of 1999:

"Ear cropping and tail docking in dogs for cosmetic reasons are not medically indicated nor of benefit to the patient. These procedures cause pain and distress, and, as with all surgical procedures, are accompanied by inherent risks of anesthesia, blood loss and infection.

*Therefore, veterinarians should counsel dog owners about these matters before agreeing to perform these surgeries."*⁵

In 2008 and again in 2012, the AVMA added the following to their official position (much to the dismay of the AKC):

*"The AVMA opposes ear cropping and tail docking of dogs when done solely for cosmetic purposes. The AVMA encourages the elimination of ear cropping and tail docking from breed standards."*⁶

My opinion is that the ideal "standard" for the appearance and function of your canine companion is quite evident at birth. His or her ears and tail were created exactly the way they were meant to be.

Other Locations Where Ear Cropping Is Currently Banned or Restricted

Many Canadian provinces in addition to British Columbia prohibit ear cropping, including Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Saskatchewan. The Kennel Club in the United Kingdom not only supports the ban on ear cropping, but also prohibits dogs with cropped ears from competing in shows.

Ear cropping is also banned in Australia, New Zealand, and parts of Europe. In the U.S., the practice is regulated in some states, including Connecticut, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington.

Sources and References

[DogChannel.com](#) October 28, 2015

¹ [Global News](#), October 27, 2015

² [Stop the Crops](#)

³ [AKC](#)

^{4,5,6} [AVMA](#)
