

Canine Catch-Neuter-Return (CNR) Good Practice Guides

Returning the dog to the streets

Learning Outcomes:

1. Describe the requirements of a clinical exam of the dog prior to release
2. Outline other provisions required prior to return in order to minimise the negative impacts on dog welfare
3. Explain the importance of accurate record keeping in order to return the dog to its catch location

Planning release of dogs is an important part of effective catch neuter return or CNR. There are variations between CNR programmes as to when the dogs are returned to the streets. Some programmes will do same day release and others will house the dogs in kennels for 3-7 days post-operatively for monitoring. Research indicates that dogs show pain signs for at least 24 hours post-operatively and so analgesia should be provided for at least this duration. Regardless of how long the dogs remain at the clinic for post-operative observations, all dogs must receive a clinical examination immediately prior to release, and all dogs should receive food and water prior to release. The clinical exam does not need to be detailed or time consuming but is crucial to ensure dog welfare is not compromised when the dogs are returned to the streets.

The clinical examination should include a:

1. Mentation assessment. Is the dog fully aware of its surroundings and walking well, and therefore able to exhibit normal behaviours to protect itself when back out on the streets?
2. Pain assessment. Dogs must be pain assessed and adequately analgesed prior to release.
3. Wound assessment. Ensure the surgical wound is clean, healing well and there are no signs of breakdown or infection present (redness, swelling or discharge). If it is possible to examine the wound through the cage without stressing the patient this would be ideal but if you are unable to see the wound then the patient needs to be removed from the cage, with restraint if necessary, to examine the wound.

There is a risk of dehydration during transportation and it is unknown where or when the dog will next find a source of food and water. For these reasons, it is vital that dogs have access to fresh water right up until they are placed into the vehicle.

Additionally, offering a small meal shortly before the dogs are released will provide nutrition to aid wound healing and recovery. Do not provide a large meal or feed immediately before release as this may increase the risks of vomiting during transport.



Dogs being fed a small meal prior to release later the same day

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The dogs must be easily identifiable as having been through the CNR programme once returned back into the community, for example using an ear notch, ear tag, or collar.

This is for future surveying purposes and preventing unnecessary harm from re-capture as well as for the community to easily identify these dogs. The identification used must be consistent in all dogs going through the CNR programme and ideally with other neuter programmes in the same area or nearby areas.



A dog with a notched ear and a velcro fastened collar to identify it as having been through a CNR programme

Dogs are territorial and each dog must be returned to the exact location where he or she was caught. This relies on detailed record keeping and dog identification to ensure the right dog is released to the right location where the dog was caught. When releasing the dog, a quiet area away from roads should be used where possible as the dog may be disorientated and therefore vulnerable. If the dog is not returned to its catching location then the CNR programme is not fulfilling its aim and instead essentially becomes a catch and remove programme. Additionally, relocating the dog will negatively impact on that dog's welfare as there will likely be other dogs already present in this new area and will result in dog fighting.

If there is a guardian of the street dog then post-operative care instructions can be explained verbally and leaflets should be provided to support the community in caring for the street dog. This also allows for future contact for follow-up post-operative checks and surveying of the dogs within the community. Engaging with the community is an essential step in successful dog population management and we strongly recommend that all staff involved in a CNR programme discuss the benefits of the project within their own communities.

Checklist:

- ✓ Clinical exam to include mentation, pain and wound assessment
- ✓ Provision of fresh water and food prior to release
- ✓ Accurate record keeping to ensure the dog is returned to its exact catch location
- ✓ Consistent dog identification for all dogs that have been through the program
- ✓ Engaging with the community about the benefits of the CNR project is essential

References:

Bacon, H., et al. (2017). "Canine trap-neuter-return: a critical review of potential welfare issues." *Animal Welfare* 26(3): 281-292.

Reece, J. F., and Chawla, S.K., (2002). *ABC Compounders' Training Manual*. Jaipur, India, Help in Suffering.