



CAT DECLAWING BANS

Frequently Asked Questions

What is declawing?

Declawing is **not** simply a removal of a cat's claws.

Declawing, or onychectomy, is a serious medical procedure where a cat's third phalanges (toe bones) and claws are surgically amputated.¹ The American Veterinary Medical Association states it "should be regarded as major surgery."² The term "declawing" is not very accurate because more than just claws are removed; the last bone and connecting tendons and ligaments on a cat's paw are also removed. The Paw Project, a national nonprofit that educates the public about the negative impacts of feline declawing, notes that "de-knuckling" is a better term.³ In humans, declawing would be like amputating the finger at the last knuckle.

What are the long-term impacts of declawing surgery?

Complications from the surgery itself include "anesthetic complications, hemorrhage, infection and pain."⁴ And after the recovery period, declawing can result in lifelong physical and behavioral problems. Declawing can cause permanent disability. Specifically, a declawed cat is at risk of pain in the paw, lameness, infection, dead tissue, nerve damage, bone spurs, and back pain. Cats are naturally digitigrades (meaning animals that walk on their toes). Declawing changes the way that a cat walks, and over time, this imbalance can also cause chronic pain. If the nail is not removed properly, it can regrow, an incredibly painful process for cats.

Since declawing inhibits a cat's normal means of movement and defense, behavioral impacts can also result. Documented effects of declawing include interference with litterbox use. Other cats may resort to biting because they have been stripped of their primary defense mechanism. Declawing fundamentally changes a cat's natural instincts to use their claws to stretch, scratch, and mark territory.

Is declawing legal in other countries?

Declawing is illegal in the majority of European countries, including Britain. In Israel, the punishment for declawing a cat is a year in prison and a \$20,000 fine.⁵ These countries recognize that "declawing" is nothing but a euphemism for mutilation.



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Does declawing reduce animal shelter admissions?

No, there is no evidence that declawing reduces shelter admissions. As stated above, behavioral side effects of declawed cats can include an aversion to using the litterbox and increased biting. Because of these behavioral impacts, declawing is not a guarantee that a cat will not be surrendered to a shelter. Anecdotally, one shelter in New York City states that 10% of adoptable cats are declawed. Declawed cats in shelters are also difficult to rehome because of biting and litterbox issues.⁶

Furthermore, all the major animal protection organizations oppose declawing. Most of these organizations' primary (or substantial) goal is to reduce euthanasia of healthy companion animals in shelters. Animal advocates would not jeopardize cats' lives if there were benefits to declawing.

Why is declawing still done if it's so detrimental to cats?

Declawing is a lucrative procedure for veterinarians. Bills have been proposed in New York, New Jersey, and California that would ban declawing. In New York, veterinary groups and lobbyists have spent tens of thousands of dollars to try to defeat it (and have been successful to date).⁷

There are extremely rare circumstances, such as cancer in the nailbed, where declawing surgery is necessary. Virtually every proposed declawing ban includes an exemption for this. It's a hollow argument when opposition groups argue that declawing bans limit a veterinarian's ability to treat his patients. Every ban includes an exemption so that a veterinarian can perform declawing when medically necessary.

Why do cats scratch?

Scratching is a normal, healthy behavior for cats. Scratching is not "bad" or intended to be destructive. Cats scratch because it's an effective way to stretch their back muscles, relieves stress, enables cats to mark their territory, and keeps their nails in good condition. Cat nails have layers, called "husks." Scratching removes those outer layers to make room for newer, stronger nails. *Not* scratching would be the more abnormal behavior.

What if a person is seriously ill or has a weak immune system that makes him susceptible to disease?

Notably, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) website about living safely with your cats does not include declawing in its list of recommendations for reducing cat scratching. Instead, the CDC recommends avoiding rough play and trimming cats' nails frequently.⁸ Furthermore, guidelines about living with HIV, jointly produced by the CDC, the National Institutes of Health, and the HIV Medicine Association of the Infectious Diseases Society of America, states "declawing is not advised."⁹

Are there humane alternatives to declawing?

Behavioral training, nail trimming, and nail caps are all ways to reduce unwanted effects of scratching. There are extensive online resources about training your cat to use a scratching post or similar item instead of your furniture. Offering a variety of attractive materials to scratch (like cardboard or carpet) in different positions (upright or horizontal) is also effective. Make sure that some of these objects are anchored so cats can scratch robustly. Keeping the nails trim is also an important, but sometimes overlooked, step. Of course, some people want a physical block between the cat's nails and the world. In that case, Soft Paws, plastic caps that are applied to the tips of each toenail, can be applied. Additional options are to cover furniture, use deterrent sprays, or to restrict a cat's access to certain rooms within the home.

What is a declawing ban?

A declawing ban is legislation that prohibits the declawing of a cat except for medical purposes within a particular city or state.

Where is declawing already banned?

While no state has yet passed a declawing ban, multiple cities in California have enacted ordinances: Los Angeles, Santa Monica, Beverly Hills, Berkeley, Culver City, Burbank, San Francisco, and West Hollywood. In addition, several California cities and counties have passed resolutions condemning declawing.



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SAMPLE ORDINANCES

Los Angeles, CA

Sec. 53.72. Declawing of Cats or Other Animals – Prohibition¹⁰

(a) No person, licensed medical professional or otherwise, shall perform or cause to be performed an onychectomy (declawing) or flexor tendonectomy procedure by any means on a cat or on any other animal within the City, except when necessary for a therapeutic purpose. Therapeutic purpose means the necessity to address the medical condition of the animal, such as an existing or recurring illness, infection, disease, injury or abnormal condition in the claw that compromises the animal's health. Therapeutic purpose does not include cosmetic or aesthetic reasons or reasons of convenience in keeping or handling the animal.

(b) In the event that an onychectomy or flexor tendonectomy procedure is performed on any animal with the City in violation of this Section, each of the following persons shall be guilty of a violation of this Section: (1) the person or persons performing the procedure, (2) all persons assisting in the physical performance of the procedure, and (3) all persons or entities that procured the procedure, including but not limited to the owner or person having custody or control over the animal or any other person or entity that ordered, requested or paid for the procedure.

(c) A violation of any of the provisions of this Section is a misdemeanor.

Santa Monica, CA

4.04.275 Prohibition against procuring, performing or assisting in performing onychectomy (declawing) or flexor tendonectomy¹¹

(a) Prohibition. No licensed medical professional or other person shall perform, assist in the performance of, or procure the performance of an onychectomy (declawing) or flexor tendonectomy procedure by any means on any cat within the City.

(b) Exception. Notwithstanding subsection (a), an onychectomy (declawing) or flexor tendonectomy procedure may be performed within the City if the procedure is necessary to address a medical condition of the cat, such as an existing or recurring illness, infection, disease, injury or abnormal condition in the claw, that compromises the animal's health. This exception does not allow procedures undertaken for cosmetic or aesthetic reasons or for any person's convenience.

(c) Penalty. Any person who violates this Section shall be guilty of misdemeanor and shall be fined in an amount not to exceed five hundred dollars or be imprisoned for a period of six months, or both. (Added by Ord. No. 2300CCS § 1, adopted 11/10/09)



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CAT DECLAWING BANS

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Beverly Hills, CA

5-2-601: Findings¹²

A. There is a widespread misunderstanding in the community regarding a commonly performed surgical procedure known as onychectomy, or "declawing". Contrary to most people's understanding, declawing consists of amputating not just the claws but the whole phalanx (up to the joint), including bones, ligaments, and tendons.

B. Declawing is not a simple cosmetic procedure akin to a manicure or a pedicure. On the contrary, to remove a claw, the bone, nerve, joint capsule, collateral ligaments, and the extensor and flexor tendons must all be amputated. Thus, declawing is not a "simple", single surgery but ten (10) separate, painful amputations of the third phalanx up to the last joint of each toe. In human terms, this is akin to cutting off the last joint of each finger.

C. Declawing robs an animal of an integral means of movement and defense. Because they cannot defend themselves adequately against attacks by other animals, declawed animals that are allowed outdoors are at increased risk of injury or death. Likewise, animals subjected to flexor tendonectomy, a procedure in which the animal's toes are cut so that the claws cannot be extended, are also robbed of an integral means of defense and thus imperils its health and safety.

D. Research has demonstrated that the rate of complication with onychectomy is relatively high compared to other procedures considered "routine". Complications can include excruciating pain, damage to the radial nerve, hemorrhage, bone chips that prevent healing, painful regrowth of deformed claw inside of the paw which is not visible to the eye, necrosis, lameness and chronic back and joint pain as shoulder, leg and back muscles weaken.

E. Although there is a widespread belief that declawing makes cats more "house friendly" and, therefore, less likely to be abandoned and subsequently euthanized, a survey conducted by Forgotten Felines and Friends of Caddo Parish in Louisiana found that approximately seventy percent (70%) of cats surrendered to the city shelter were declawed. Declawed cats are generally not adoptable from shelters because of their behavioral and other problems, and they are therefore usually euthanized.

F. There are a number of alternatives to onychectomy (declawing) and flexor tendonectomy that involve no physical harm to the animal. Harmless alternatives include training the pet to use a scratch post, use of deterrent pheromone sprays, covering furniture, restricting the pet's access to certain areas of the home, use of plastic nail covers, and more.

G. In addition to the harm these procedures cause to cats, they also have detrimental consequences for humans. Declawing unnecessarily increases public health and safety risks. Research indicates that a substantial number of declawed cats become more prone to biting as a form of defense. Research has also shown that declawed cats tend to avoid use of litter boxes because the rough surface hurts their paws, and this causes sanitation problems.



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Beverly Hills, CA (cont.)

5-2-601: Findings¹² (cont.)

H. Considering the wide array of alternatives, the city council finds that the mere convenience of the onychectomy (declawing) and/or flexor tendonectomy procedures to the pet's guardian does not justify the unnecessary pain, anguish and permanent disability caused to the animal.

I. The city of Beverly Hills enacts this article pursuant to the authority vested in the city by article XI, section 7 of the California constitution allowing a city to make and enforce within its limits all local, police, sanitary, and other ordinances and regulations not in conflict with general laws. At present, the law of the state of California does not prohibit the city from acting to prohibit onychectomy and flexor tendonectomy and therefore the city is not preempted by Business and Professions Code section 460 from adopting this article. See also, California Veterinary Medical Ass'n v. City of West Hollywood, 152 Cal.App.4th 536 (2007) (court of appeal held that the city of West Hollywood's ordinance prohibiting onychectomy and flexor tendonectomy was within the city's police power to prevent animal cruelty and such an ordinance was not preempted by state law).

J. The city council finds that prohibiting these procedures will protect and promote the general health, safety and welfare of cats and humans alike. (Ord. 09-O-2573, eff. 12-18-2009)

5-2-602: Prohibited

No person, licensed medical professional or otherwise, shall perform or cause to be performed, assist in the performance of, or procure the performance of an onychectomy (declawing) or flexor tendonectomy procedure by any means on any cat or other animal within the city of Beverly Hills, except when necessary for a therapeutic purpose. "Therapeutic purpose" means the necessity to address the medical condition of the animal, such as an existing or recurring illness, infection, disease, injury or abnormal condition in the claw that compromises the animal's health.

"Therapeutic purpose" does not include cosmetic or aesthetic reasons or reasons of convenience in keeping or handling the animal. In the event that an onychectomy or flexor tendonectomy procedure is performed on any cat or other animal within the city of Beverly Hills in violation of this section, each of the following persons shall be guilty of a violation of this section: a) the person or persons performing the procedure, b) all persons assisting in the physical performance of the procedure, and c) all persons or entities that procured the procedure, including, but limited to, any animal guardian, owner or other person that ordered, requested or paid for the procedure. (Ord. 09-O-2573, eff. 12-18-2009)



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The Fine Print (sources)

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