

Reporting Drivers with Diabetes Mellitus to PennDOT Frequently Asked Questions

Which patients with diabetes must be reported?

PennDOT's medical regulations require you to report any patient over 15 years of age with unstable diabetes mellitus leading to a severe hypoglycemic reaction or symptomatic hyperglycemia unless there has been a continuous period of at least six months free from such episodes.

How does PennDOT define “severe hypoglycemic reaction” and “symptomatic hyperglycemia” and do I have any discretion in determining when to report a patient to PennDOT?

PennDOT's medical regulations define severe hypoglycemic reaction as “hypoglycemia that requires outside intervention or assistance of others or that produces confusion, loss of attention or a loss of consciousness.” Symptomatic hyperglycemia is defined as “high glucose levels in the blood that have caused a loss of consciousness or an altered state of perception, including, but not limited to, decreased reaction time, impaired vision or hearing, or both, and confusion.”

If you feel your patient is safe to operate a motor vehicle, even though he/she may have experienced some confusion, loss of attention, or an altered state of perception, and the episode did not require outside intervention, you do not have to report that patient to PennDOT. PennDOT's medical regulations are designed to disqualify only those individuals who represent a safety risk on the roadways. Patients who have suffered a loss of consciousness should always be reported.

I have a patient who has unstable diabetes and had a severe hypoglycemic reaction. Do I need to report the patient to PennDOT?

Yes. PennDOT's medical regulations require an individual who has been diagnosed with unstable diabetes who has a “severe” hypoglycemic reaction to have his/her driving privilege recalled and remain episode free for six (6) months before restoration of the driving privilege can be considered. Note: There are some specific circumstances where a driver can retain his/her license under a waiver, as described further down.

A patient tells me that he had an episode of confusion and did not seek or receive outside help, but it sounds like the episode was bad and the patient has struggled with managing his diabetes in the past; should I report him?

This is where your knowledge of and experience with your patient will guide your decision about whether to report the patient or not. If you have doubts about your patient's ability to drive safely, err on the side of caution and report the patient.

A patient tells me that she was a bit confused but then took steps to manage her diabetes and made sure she was fully recovered before she drove again; should I report her?

A patient who has a history of safely managing her condition should probably not be reported for experiencing a mild episode of confusion that the patient remedied. But use your discretion; when in doubt, report the patient for their own safety.

I have a patient who had a disqualifying episode secondary to another illness. Do I need to report them to PennDOT?

Yes; however, PennDOT's medical regulations contain a waiver provision that would allow your patient to continue driving as long as you verify in your report that the disqualifying episode occurred while the

patient was under the treating health care provider's care, during or concurrent with a nonrecurring transient illness, toxic ingestion or metabolic imbalance, and that it was a temporary condition not likely to recur.

During the course of adjusting my patient's medication, they had a disqualifying episode. Do I need to report them to PennDOT?

Yes; however, PennDOT's medical regulations contain a waiver provision that would allow your patient to continue driving as long as you verify in your report that the disqualifying episode occurred while he/she was under your supervision, and that it was a temporary condition not likely to recur.

Do you require any specific medical testing before restoring the driving privilege of someone that has been medically recalled?

Yes; the individual must submit to a diabetic examination, which includes an HbA1C test as well as a vision screening. (The regulations do not require the individual to achieve any particular HbA1C result in order for his or her license to be restored.) In addition to submitting the results of the examination and screening, the treating health care provider must also certify that the individual has been free from a disqualifying episode for the last six (6) months.

Individuals who have had a disqualifying episode and are eligible for restoration must submit to follow-up diabetic examinations, which include an HbA1C test as well as a vision screening at 6, 12, 24, and finally 48 month intervals. Diabetic examinations may be required more frequently if recommended by the treating health care provider.

I have a patient that had a "mild" hypoglycemic reaction. Do I need to report him/her to PennDOT?

No. PennDOT's medical regulations are designed to disqualify individuals who represent a safety risk on the roadways. Individuals who have only mild reactions can self correct with oral carbohydrates.

I have a patient that had a disqualifying episode because of alcohol ingestion. Do I need to report them to PennDOT?

Yes; however, PennDOT's medical regulations also contain a waiver provision that would allow your patient to continue driving as long as you verify in your report that the disqualifying episode occurred while he/she was under your supervision and that it was a temporary condition not likely to recur.

I have a patient that had a disqualifying episode because he/she forgot to take his/her diabetic medication. Do I need to report him/her to PennDOT?

Yes; however, PennDOT's medical regulations specifically disqualify only those individuals who have been diagnosed with "unstable" diabetes mellitus leading to a severe hypoglycemic reaction or a symptomatic hyperglycemia. If your patient's diabetes is stable, and the disqualifying episode was an isolated incident that is not likely to recur, then PennDOT will not take any action relating to that particular disqualifying episode. (PennDOT may take action relating to other medical information available.)

I have a patient that was diagnosed with diabetes mellitus as a result of a disqualifying episode. Do I need to report the patient to PennDOT? Will the patient be required to remain episode free for six months before being eligible to have the driver's license restored?

Yes. You need to report the patient to PennDOT. A waiver may be possible if the patient meets the criteria outlined above. Otherwise, the driver's license will be recalled for a minimum of six months. As long as the individual hasn't had any subsequent episodes within the last six months, he/she will be eligible for restoration.