



# Their Safety, Your Responsibility:

A Guide for Health Care Professionals



# Protecting Public Safety

The public has a right to protection from death, injury or property loss caused by drivers with medical conditions that impair their ability to drive safely. Medical reporting plays a vital role in providing this protection.

Pennsylvania's health care professionals are required by state law to report any individuals aged 15 and older to PennDOT who have medical conditions that impair a person's ability to drive safely.

Many of Pennsylvania's 1.9 million older driving adults self-regulate when they realize health factors are putting themselves and others at risk. But other drivers with diminished ability get behind the wheel because they view not being able to drive as the loss of independence – and that can have a tragic result.

Medical reporting assists PennDOT in determining whether those individuals who are applying for a driver's license or those individuals already possessing a driver's license are medically qualified to safely operate a motor vehicle. Without the cooperation of medical providers, thousands of medically impaired drivers would remain undetected.

Medical reporting is a very effective mechanism for identifying medically impaired drivers. Approximately 35,000 new reports are submitted each year to PennDOT. About 10,000 of these individuals have medical impairments significant enough to merit recall of their driving privilege. An additional 21 percent of reports result in restrictions placed on the individual's driving privilege. These reports also cross the age spectrum; half involve drivers under 65 years of age.

# How the Driver Evaluation Process Works

The receipt of a report triggers an evaluation process, which is performed by PennDOT's Medical Unit. Upon careful evaluation of the information received, the Medical Unit will do one of the following:

1. Restrictions to the person's driving privilege may be added or deleted;
2. The person's license may be recalled or restored;
3. The person may be asked to provide more specific medical information or complete a drivers examination; or
4. No action may be taken.

Although certain health care personnel have a legal responsibility to report, and PennDOT may request further medical information, ultimately it is PennDOT, not the health care personnel, that determines if a license should be recalled or restored. The Commonwealth has the option of placing restrictions on driving and the patient may also be asked to have an additional medical evaluation or driver's test.



# An Overview of the Medical Criteria

PennDOT has a Medical Advisory Board (MAB) responsible for the formulation and revision of physical and mental criteria, including vision standards, for the licensing of drivers. The MAB consists of a neurologist, a cardiologist, an internist, a general practitioner, an ophthalmologist, a psychiatrist, an orthopedic surgeon, an optometrist, and members from PennDOT, Department of Health, Department of Drug and Alcohol, and the Pennsylvania State Police.

The formulation and revision of these regulations is open for public review and comment through the Commonwealth's Regulatory Review process. Medical regulations pertaining to driver qualifications can be found online at [www.pacode.com](http://www.pacode.com), and specifically in Title 67, Chapter 83, Physical and Mental Criteria, Including Vision Standards Relating to the Licensing of Drivers.



The following is a broad overview of requirements and disqualifying conditions. Specific guidelines can be found in the regulations.

Several conditions require the individual to remain episode free for a specific term before he/she is eligible to have the driving privilege restored. Other conditions cause an indefinite recall of the driving privilege until the condition has improved to the point where the treating health care provider indicates that the patient can safely operate a motor vehicle.

### **Minimum Vision Requirements**

Drivers must meet minimum visual acuity and field of vision requirements with or without correction.

### **Restricted License Vision Requirements**

A low vision restricted license is available to drivers who meet certain visual acuity requirements. Please note that this type of license will only be issued upon the recommendation of a licensed optometrist, ophthalmologist, or physician who has the equipment to properly evaluate acuity.

### **Seizures**

A person with a seizure disorder must be seizure-free for a specified period of time in order to maintain their driving privilege. Waivers are available upon recommendation of a licensed health care provider under certain circumstances.

### **General Disqualifications**

- Unstable or brittle diabetes or hypoglycemia.
- Cerebral vascular insufficiency or cardiovascular disease that resulted in:
  - Syncopal attack or loss of consciousness.
  - Vertigo, paralysis or loss of qualifying visual fields.
- Periodic episodes of loss of consciousness of unknown etiology or not otherwise categorized.

## Disqualifications on Provider's Recommendation

- Loss of a joint or extremity as a functional defect or limitation.
- Impairment of the use of a joint or extremity as a functional defect or limitation:
  - The provider should inform the patient of the prohibition against driving due to the functional impairment.
  - The provider should inform the Department in writing of the impairment if the condition has lasted or is expected to last longer than 90 days.
- Rheumatic, arthritic, orthopedic, muscular, vascular or neuromuscular disease:
  - The provider should inform the patient of the prohibition against driving due to the functional impairment.
  - The provider shall inform the Department in writing of the impairment if the condition has lasted or is expected to last longer than 90 days.
- Cerebral vascular insufficiency or cardiovascular disease which, within the last 6 months, has resulted in lack of coordination, confusion, loss of awareness, dyspnea upon mild exertion, or any other symptom that impairs the ability to drive safely.
- Mental disorder.
- Periodic episodes of loss of attention or awareness which are of unknown etiology or not otherwise categorized.
- Use of any drug or substance, including alcohol, known to impair skill or functions, regardless if medically prescribed.
- Other conditions which, in the opinion of a provider, is likely to impair the ability to control and safely operate a motor vehicle.

# Recommending a Driving Evaluation

If you feel that a patient is medically qualified but you are uncertain if he/she is physically able to drive safely, you may note on the medical form that “medically” they meet the minimum standards; however, you want them to pass a driver’s test before they are cleared to drive.

This comment lets PennDOT know it’s safe to put a driver’s license examiner in a vehicle with this individual and also gives you, the health care provider, the assurance that they will not be cleared unless they demonstrate the necessary skills.

# Identifying the Need for Adaptive Equipment

Based upon your report and subsequent evaluation, PennDOT may determine that a driver must be restricted to driving only when utilizing appropriate adaptive equipment, such as hand controls, left foot gas pedal or spinner knob, in order to safely operate a vehicle.

For instances where you are unsure if a driver needs adaptive equipment, you may refer the driver to a rehabilitation center for a driving evaluation.



# Performing Due Diligence While Protecting Confidentiality

PennDOT's Medical Reporting Program is designed both to protect the anonymity of the health care provider making the report and also to respect patient confidentiality.

## Confidentiality of Reports

Reports submitted to PennDOT are confidential and used solely to determine the qualification of an individual to drive a motor vehicle. PennDOT is compelled by law to honor this provision and will not release information regarding the source or content of the report, even when the inquiry is from the patient who was reported. The only time this information would be released is during a court proceeding, where the driver is challenging a recall or suspension of their driving privilege.







## Helping Patients Cope with Driving Limitations

No other options are as effective as medical reporting in identifying drivers who can no longer operate a vehicle safely. Some states have statutory requirements for self-reporting, but research indicates an extremely high rate of noncompliance.

Research shows that older drivers prefer to discuss concerns about their driving with their health care provider. Providers should recognize the emotional issues for their patients who are facing the possibility of restricting or stopping driving altogether. You can encourage patients and family members to address their medical issues, improve their driving skills and think about developing alternative mobility plans.

Other brochures in PennDOT's Seniors Driving Safely Series, *"Older, Wiser, Safer: A Senior Driver's Guide,"* *"Keeping Older Drivers Safe: A Guide for Family and Friends,"* and *"Staying Safe: What to Expect When Your Medical Condition Has Been Reported to PennDOT,"* provide helpful information and tips. Additional resources are listed at the end of this guide.

# Making a Report

All physicians, chiropractors, physician assistants, certified registered nurse practitioners and other persons authorized to diagnose or treat disorders and disabilities are required to report within 10 days, in writing, the full name, address and date of birth of every person diagnosed as having a condition that could impair his/her ability to drive a motor vehicle safely. It is helpful to PennDOT in making a licensing determination if you include the conditions and any specific information about the condition. The report may be made by writing a letter or by using PennDOT's condition-specific medical form(s) or PennDOT's Initial Reporting Form (DL-13).

## Accessing and Submitting Forms

If you have online access to PennDOT's condition-specific medical forms, you may use the applicable form(s) as an initial report. If you do not currently have online access to the medical forms, but are interested in obtaining access, visit the Medical Reporting Information Center on PennDOT's Driver and Vehicle Services website, [www.dmv.pa.gov](http://www.dmv.pa.gov), to register.

Go to Information Centers and click on "Medical Reporting." You will be taken to the Medical Reporting Information Center. Here you will find more information on reporting requirements, as well as information on filling out and submitting Medical Reporting Forms online.

You can also reach the Medical Unit by phone at 717-787-9662, Monday-Friday during regular business hours.

The address is:

Bureau of Driver Licensing  
Driver Qualifications Section  
P.O. Box 68682  
Harrisburg, PA 17106-8682

## **Understanding Your Liability for Reporting or Not Reporting**

When you report, you are exempt from any civil or criminal liability. No action may be brought against any person or agency for providing the required information. However, if you DO NOT report, there is a possibility that you could be held responsible as a proximate cause of an accident resulting in death, injury or property loss caused by your patient. Also, providers who do not comply with their legal requirement to report may be convicted of a summary criminal offense.

## **Knowing Your Legal Liability When Issuing Patient Driving Restrictions**

As long as you notify the patient that you are instructing them to restrict or halt their driving, and you have it documented in the patient's file, the Pennsylvania Courts have determined that you shouldn't be held responsible if he/she continues to drive and is involved in a crash. (That does not mean, however, that you can't be named in a law suit.)

This is the case with any condition you report to PennDOT. Always notify your patient if there are any restrictions or prohibitions to driving. Remember to document your instructions to the patient in his/her file.

## **Dealing with Patient Non-compliance**

If you become aware of a patient not following your instructions to refrain from driving or not following your prescribed treatment plan, please notify the Medical Unit. Although they can't provide any details back to you, they can research the case to determine if the patient is medically qualified to drive. In some cases when a driver files an appeal of their license recall or suspension, a judge will order a supersedeas, which allows the driver to continue to drive legally until their case is heard. If the driver is not medically qualified, PennDOT can notify law enforcement for their assistance in getting the medically unqualified driver off the road.

# Mature Driver Improvement Courses

Under PA law individuals may be entitled to at least a 5 percent discount on their entire automobile insurance policy if they are 55 or older and successfully complete a driver improvement course approved by PennDOT. Those interested should check with their insurance carrier for the specifics of their program.

There are four state-approved courses that are held at various locations throughout the commonwealth as well as online including [AAA](#), [AARP](#), [Seniors for Safe Driving](#), and [Safe2Drive](#). (Please see the following contact information below.)

All approved courses specifically address the safety needs of the mature driver. There are no written or practical driving tests required. The course fees are moderate, but vary with each organization.

## American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)

1-888-227-7669 (1-800-AARP-NOW)

30 North 3rd Street, Suite 750  
Harrisburg, PA 17101



[www.aarpdriversafety.org](http://www.aarpdriversafety.org)

AARP's Driver Safety website includes information on courses, auto insurance discounts, adapting automobiles, new technology as well as online seminars.

## American Automobile Association (AAA)

1-800-723-7021 | Locations Nationwide



[www.aaa.com](http://www.aaa.com)

AAA offers multiple online resources for mature drivers – find your local AAA office to check on mature driver improvement course availability in your area.

[www.seniordriving.aaa.com](http://www.seniordriving.aaa.com)

Visit this AAA website to find mature driver evaluation tools, ways to improve on essential driving skills and tips for maintaining mobility and independence longer.

[www.aaafoundation.org/senior-drivers](http://www.aaafoundation.org/senior-drivers)

Discover more AAA information on topics affecting safety such as automobile technologies as well as self-assessments to screen for potential driving risk factors.

## Seniors For Safe Driving

1-800-559-4880

[www.seniorsforsafedriving.com](http://www.seniorsforsafedriving.com)

Mature drivers can find one or two-day classes at a location near them or online.



## Safe2Drive

1-800-763-1297

**SAFE2DRIVE**

[www.safe2drive.com](http://www.safe2drive.com)

Here mature drivers can choose from either a Basic Course or a Refresher Course where, once completed, they will receive a Certificate of Completion when they pass a final exam.

# More Safety Resources for Senior Drivers

## **Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT)**



1-800-932-4600 • 1101 S. Front Street • Harrisburg, PA 17104

[www.penndot.gov/safety](http://www.penndot.gov/safety)

The Traffic Safety and Driver Topics section of this website contains an array of information pertaining to safely operating a motor vehicle.

[www.dmv.pa.gov/Driver-Services/Mature-Drivers](http://www.dmv.pa.gov/Driver-Services/Mature-Drivers)

The Mature Driver section of PennDOT's website offers resources for drivers including safety tips, improvement courses and licensing laws as well as information for the health care community and medical reporting tools.

## **National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)**



1-888-327-4236

[www.nhtsa.gov/Driving+Safety/Older+Drivers](http://www.nhtsa.gov/Driving+Safety/Older+Drivers)

NHTSA offers guides, research reports and toolkits for mature drivers and those around them, including family and friends, medical professionals and law enforcement officers.

## **Pennsylvania Department of Aging (PDA)**



717-783-1550 • 555 Walnut Street, 5th Fl. • Harrisburg, PA 17101

[www.aging.pa.gov/aging-services/transportation](http://www.aging.pa.gov/aging-services/transportation)

The Aging Services/ Transportation section of this website provides details on the PA Free Transit Program for individuals 65+, the Shared Ride Program, and also offers additional resources and links.



## CarFit

[www.car-fit.org](http://www.car-fit.org)



CarFit is an educational program that offers older adults the opportunity to check how well their personal vehicles “fit” them.

The CarFit program also provides information and materials on community-specific resources that could enhance their safety as drivers, and/or increase their mobility in the community.

## PA Yellow Dot

[www.penndot.gov/TravelInPA/Pages/Yellow-Dot.aspx](http://www.penndot.gov/TravelInPA/Pages/Yellow-Dot.aspx)



This program assists citizens in the “golden hour” of emergency care following a traffic accident when they may not be able to communicate their needs themselves. Placing a Yellow Dot decal in your vehicle’s rear window alerts first responders to check your glove compartment for vital information to ensure you receive the medical attention you need. The program is a cooperative effort between PennDOT, the Department of Health and Aging, the State Police, the Turnpike Commission, first responders and local law enforcement.

## The Emergency Contact Information Program

The Emergency Contact Information Program was developed to allow your emergency contact information to be quickly available to law enforcement through a secure online database.

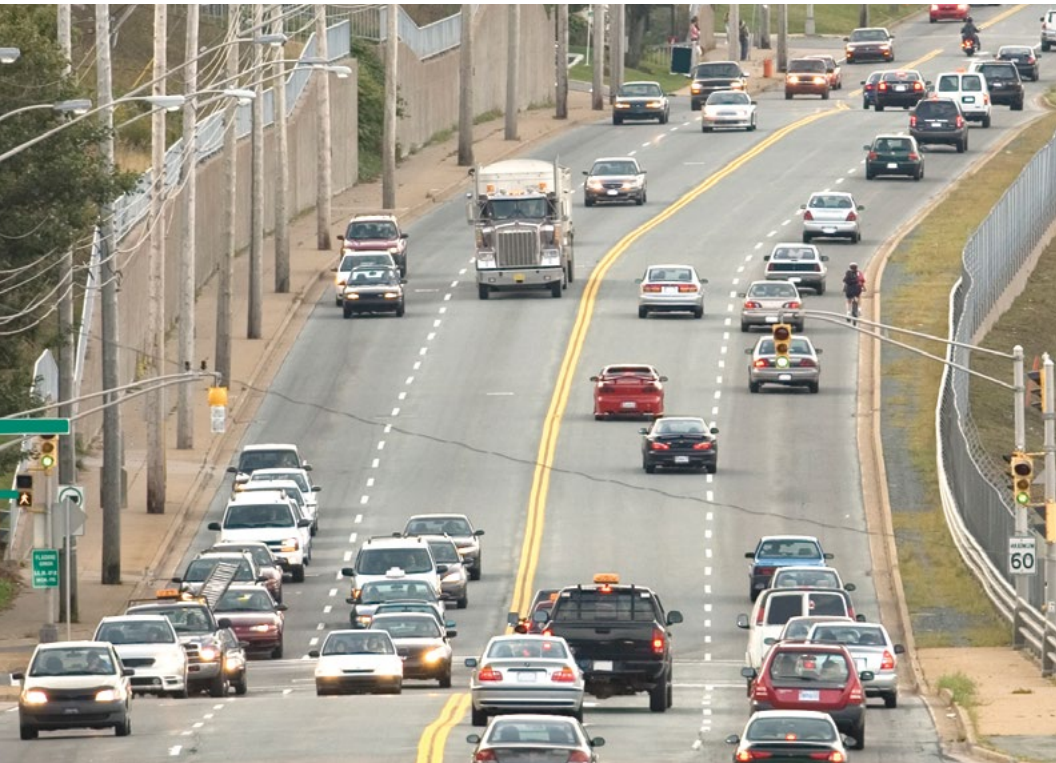


Upload Emergency  
Contact Information

Just visit [www.dmv.pa.gov](http://www.dmv.pa.gov) and click on the icon you see to the right to use your Pennsylvania Driver’s License or ID information to enter emergency contacts to speak for you if ever you can’t speak for yourself.

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# Other Brochures in the Seniors Driving Safely Series

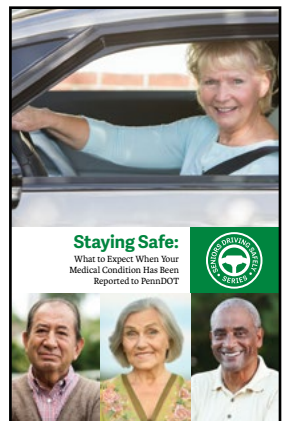
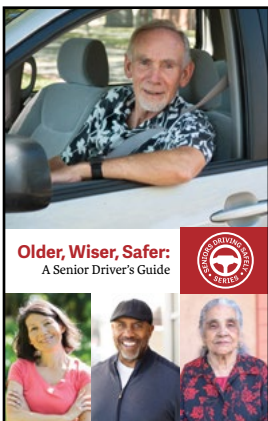
The publication you are reading is part of PennDOT's Seniors Driving Safely Series, developed for mature drivers and others who help to care for them. Brochures in the series include:

**Older, Wiser, Safer: A Senior Driver's Guide** provides tips for dealing with various driving situations and staying safe on the road, as well as self-tests to help seniors evaluate their driving readiness.

**Keeping Older Drivers Safe: A Guide for Family and Friends** helps adult children and other loved ones understand when and how to get involved in an older person's decisions about driving.

**Staying Safe: What to Expect When Your Medical Condition Has Been Reported to PennDOT** was developed to help seniors understand how the medical reporting process works in Pennsylvania.

PennDOT encourages you as a health care provider to refer your patients and their family members to these publications for more information and support. They can be downloaded by visiting [www.dmv.pa.gov](http://www.dmv.pa.gov). Under the "Driver Services" tab, click on "Mature Drivers".



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# About PennDOT and our Seniors Driving Safely Series

PennDOT oversees a breadth of programs and policies that ensure that the movement of people and goods within the state is safe, reliable, and efficient. We oversee an ongoing investment in the integrity of Pennsylvania's highway and bridge infrastructure. PennDOT is directly responsible for nearly 40,000 miles of highway and roughly 25,000 bridges. We also administer the state's more than 11 million vehicle registrations and 8.9 million driver's licenses and oversee safety and emission inspection programs.

While PennDOT strives to set the standard for an organized transportation structure and maintain a reliable infrastructure throughout Pennsylvania, our mission cannot be completed without the compliance and cooperation of those who utilize and operate within our state's roadways and multimodal systems. Our *Seniors Driving Safely Series* is one facet of our effort to help educate, guide, remind, assist, and protect all Pennsylvanians in getting wherever they need to go – safely.