



ASSESSING FITNESS TO DRIVE GUIDELINES 2012

INFORMATION SHEET FOR SOUTH AUSTRALIAN HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

Introduction

Each year in Australia, more than 1,300 road users are killed and 32,000 seriously injured. The social costs are considerable - the total economic costs exceed \$18 billion annually.

While many factors contribute to road safety, the health of the driver is an important consideration and drivers must meet certain medical standards to ensure that their health status does not increase the risk of a crash in which they or other road users may be killed or injured.

Responsibility of Health Professionals and the Registrar of Motor Vehicles

The *Motor Vehicles Act 1959* (the Act) places a responsibility on the Registrar of Motor Vehicles to ensure that the holder of a driver's licence, or a particular class of licence, is medically fit to drive with safety. To assist the Registrar, health professionals (medical practitioners, specialists, optometrists and physiotherapists) are obliged to notify the Registrar when they have reasonable cause to believe a person they have examined holds a driver's licence or a learner's permit and that person is suffering from a physical or mental illness, disability or deficiency such that, if the person drove a motor vehicle, he or she would be likely to endanger the public.

While the ultimate responsibility for the issue or retention of a driver's licence rests with the Registrar, the Registrar relies heavily on the advice of the person's health professional.

In accordance with the Act, when examining a person, the health professional is required to determine if the person meets the medical standards contained in the *Assessing Fitness to Drive for Commercial and Private Vehicle Drivers* (the Guidelines).

New Guidelines

Since the Guidelines were last reviewed in 2003, there have been medical advances and users of the Guidelines have gained valuable practical experience in applying the standards. A review of the Guidelines was undertaken, involving extensive consultation with health professionals, leading medical colleges and Associations, licensing authorities, industry and unions to ensure the Guidelines reflect current medical best practice.

On 1 March 2012, the new Guidelines came into effect for drivers of private (light) and commercial (heavy) vehicles. The State Government allowed a transition period from 1 March 2012 to 30 June 2012 during which time both the 2003 Guidelines and the 2012 Guidelines could be used. However, from 1 July 2012, only the 2012 Guidelines may be used.

The new Guidelines can be viewed and copies ordered via the Association of Australian and New Zealand Road Transport and Traffic Authorities (Austroads) website:

<http://www.austroads.com.au/assessing-fitness-to-drive>

Changes to the Guidelines

The Guidelines have been extensively revised focussing on various chronic medical conditions that have an effect on driving ability and crash risk. Some of the features of the revised Guidelines include an improved general guidance on driver assessment and management, improved guidance for persons with multiple medical conditions and age-related decline. The revised Guidelines provide improved clarity and decision support for health professionals, including the use of flowcharts and checklists, information about medico-legal responsibilities and links to supporting consumer information.

The new Guidelines incorporate specific changes to the recommended non-driving periods for certain medical conditions, for example, “blackouts” of unknown cause, from two months to six months for private vehicle drivers and from six months to five years for commercial vehicle drivers. Changes to the non-driving seizure free periods for drivers who have suffered one or more seizures (12 months for private vehicle drivers and 10 years for commercial vehicle drivers) have also been introduced.

Whilst the Guidelines provide more stringent and restrictive standards for certain conditions, they allow for “exceptional cases” under which a conditional licence may be considered (for both private and commercial vehicle drivers) based on medical advice that a condition is well controlled and the person does not pose a risk to other road users.

Where a conditional driver’s licence is issued, the review period is established by the Registrar based on the period prescribed in the Guidelines, or in those instances where the Guidelines do not specify a period (states “periodic review”), a period established following advice from the Registrar’s Medical Consultancy. Where the Guidelines do not prescribe a specific review period, a health professional may recommend a longer or shorter review period than that set by the Registrar. (Note: This does not apply where the licence holder is 70 years of age or older – a Certificate of Fitness is required to be completed annually).

There are also changes to the recommended review periods for licence holders who suffer from certain medical conditions, particularly cardiovascular conditions where the suggested review period has changed from three-yearly to yearly. However, the Guidelines specify that if the condition has been effectively treated, with minimal risk of recurrence, the driver may apply for an unconditional licence (i.e. not subject to regular review) on the advice of the treating doctor or specialist (in the case of a commercial vehicle driver).

If a person has multiple conditions, for example, diabetes controlled by insulin and sleep apnoea, they may be required to provide a medical report from each specialist. Further, for certain medical conditions (e.g. hypertension and diabetes treated with metformin alone), where the person is a commercial vehicle driver, and the condition is well controlled, a specialist may recommend that a general practitioner complete the Certificate of Fitness on an ongoing basis. However, the initial granting of a conditional licence is based on information provided by the specialist.

A Summary of Changes and Frequently Asked Questions is provided in the Information Kit included on the Austroads website.

Amended Certificates of Fitness

The Certificate of Fitness – Light Vehicle Drivers (MR712) and Certificate of Fitness – Heavy Vehicle Drivers (MR713) forms have been updated to more accurately reflect the 2012 Guidelines.

The amended Certificates now comprise four Sections:

- Section 1 – ‘Applicant’s Details’ to be completed by the licence holder and signed in the presence of the health professional;
- Section 2 – ‘Patient Questionnaire’ to be completed by the licence holder prior to the examination;
- Section 3 – ‘Examination Report’ to be completed by health professional (Note: the Examination Report now contains a comprehensive list of medical conditions that may affect driving);
- Section 4 – ‘Medical Practitioner’s Declaration’ including assessment and recommendations.

It is anticipated that the new certificates will be implemented from 1 August 2013.

Contacts for enquiries on the new Guidelines and/or Certificates of Fitness:

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| Mr Ron Shanks Manager, Driver Licensing Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure Locked Bag 700 GPO ADELAIDE SA 5001 Phone: (08) 8343 2298 Fax: (08) 8343 2142 | Ms Jean Phillips Manager, Licence Regulation Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure Locked Bag 700 GPO ADELAIDE SA 5001 Phone: (08) 8402 1945 Fax: (08) 8402 1978 |
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