



# **MEDICAL ASPECTS OF DRIVER LICENSING**

**A Guide for  
Registered Medical Practitioners**

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## INTRODUCTION

The general medical condition of drivers does not appear to be a major cause of road accidents involving injury to other road users. The ability to drive can, however, be seriously impaired by certain medical conditions and drivers, and prospective drivers, are accordingly subject to medical review. The purpose is to keep the more seriously affected drivers off the roads or to restrict their driving within the limitations of their disability. The advice given by doctors to their patients in this regard can make a significant contribution to road safety. The purpose of this booklet is to assist doctors in their tasks as medical examiners for driver licensing purposes and as informed advisers to their patients in relation to safer driving.

The aspects and standards of physical and mental fitness set out in this booklet are those prescribed under the Road Traffic (Licensing of Drivers) Regulations 2006, Statutory Instrument Number 537 of 2006.

## CATEGORIES OF VEHICLES

Vehicles are divided into categories (and sub-categories) for driver licensing purposes. These categories are based primarily on the type and degree of driving skills and experience which a driver needs. The categories and sub-categories are illustrated in the Table on page 5.

Vehicles are divided into only two broad groups, however, for the purpose of assessing the medical fitness of drivers the groups are based on the mental and physical demands placed on the driver of the vehicle and on the potential danger in the event of loss of control by the driver. The risk of death or other serious injury to other road users in collision with heavy goods vehicles for example, is very high because of their mass and lower braking capacity. Buses also present a special hazard because they are used to carry large numbers of people and because they are required to stop frequently at places where large numbers of people are congregated to board them. A higher standard of physical and mental fitness is, therefore, required in relation to such vehicles.

The grouping of vehicle categories for driver fitness purposes is :-

### **Group 1**

- categories A, A1, B, EB, M or W i.e. motorcycles, cars and tractors (with or without trailer)

### **Group 2**

- categories C, C1, D, D1, EC, EC1, ED or ED1 i.e. trucks and buses (with or without a trailer)

The vehicles in Group 2 are regarded as higher-risk vehicles which require a higher standard of physical and mental fitness on the part of the driver.

If it appears clear on medical examination that the patient suffers from a progressive disease or other condition which is likely to deteriorate and adversely affect his ability to drive, the medical report should recommend review after appropriate period e.g. 10 years, 3 years, 1 year.

It is suggested, however, that medical review should not be recommended unless at the time of examination there appears clearly to be a need for review.

## **CATEGORIES OF VEHICLES/MINIMUM AGE OF DRIVER**

The table on the following page outlines the various vehicle categories for driver licensing purposes and the minimum ages required for taking out licences in the respective categories.

**TABLE****Categories of Vehicles/Minimum Age of Driver**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Minimum Age</b>	<b>Vehicle</b>
A1	16	Motorcycles with an engine size of 51-125 cc and/or a speed capability over 45 km/h, and with a power rating not exceeding 11 kW, with or without sidecar
A	18	Motorcycles with or without sidecar
B	17	Vehicles with passenger accommodation for not more than 8 persons and with a design g.v.w. not exceeding 3,500 kg
C1	18	Vehicles with passenger accommodation for not more than 8 persons with a design g.v.w. over 3,500 kg but not over 7,500 kg
C	18	Vehicles with passenger accommodation for not more than 8 persons and with a design g.v.w. over 3,500 kg
D1	21	Vehicles with passenger accommodation for more than 8 persons but not more than 16 persons
D	21	Vehicles with passenger accommodation for more than 8 persons
EB	17	Vehicles in category B with a trailer attached
EC1	18	Vehicles in category C1 with a trailer attached - the combination must not exceed 12,000 kg
EC	18	Vehicles in category C with a trailer attached
ED1	21	Vehicles in category D1 with a trailer attached - the combination must not exceed 12,000 kg
ED	21	Vehicles in category D with a trailer attached
M	16	Two-wheeled vehicles with an engine size not exceeding 50 cc and/or a speed capability not more than 45 km/h.
W	16	Work vehicles and land tractors, with or without a trailer attached.

“Passenger accommodation” means seating accommodation for passengers in addition to the driver  
“Design g.v.w.” means design gross vehicle weight (i.e. design laden weight).

Manufacturers generally refer to it as gross vehicle weight (g.v.w.) and it is usually displayed on a metal plate attached to the vehicle by the manufacturer.

## GENERAL REQUIREMENTS FOR APPLICANTS

The primary requirements of medical assessment for driver licensing purposes are that a person making a first application for a provisional licence must:-

- (a) undergo an eyesight test if the application relates to vehicles in Group 1, and
- (b) undergo a full medical examination if the application relates to vehicles in Group 2.

An eyesight test may be carried out by a registered medical practitioner or by a registered ophthalmic optician. A medical examination may be carried out by a registered medical practitioner only. The report provided by the optician or doctor, as the case may be, must be submitted by the applicant to the local licensing authority TOGETHER with his application for a licence.

An applicant for a licence is also required to provide a medical report in certain other circumstances e.g. where he is over 70 years of age or suffers from any of the diseases or disabilities which are listed as requiring a medical report. Prescribed forms are available from motor tax offices for the provision of medical reports (ref. D. 501) and eyesight reports (ref. D. 502).

### Disqualifying Diseases

A person who is (1) dependent on psychotropic substances or (2) suffers from serious arrhythmia which has resulted in loss of consciousness is disqualified from holding or applying for any driving licence or provisional licence.

## REQUIRED STANDARDS OF FITNESS

The physical and mental fitness of a person to drive a vehicle should be assessed by reference to the following standards.

### Preamble

Driving is more comfortable and safe if all medical conditions are under optimal control. Specialist opinion may be helpful in cases of doubt, not only to help decision-making when driving may no longer be safe but also to ensure a maximisation of health status and the provision of relevant compensatory measures i.e. spectacles, car choice, vehicle adaptations, physiotherapy.

### Eyesight

1. The eyesight of an applicant for a licence to drive a vehicle of any category shall be examined with regard to the person's ability to see to the front, to either side and by means of a mirror or mirrors, to the rear of the vehicle. In doubtful cases particular attention shall be paid to visual acuity, field of vision, night vision and progressive eye diseases. When the wearing of corrective lenses is necessary for driving, this shall be recorded on the medical report.
2. In the case of an applicant for a licence to drive vehicles of category A1, A, B, EB, M or W, the eyesight of the person shall comply with the following standards-

#### Eyesight standards

- (a) The person shall have a binocular visual acuity (with corrective lenses where necessary) or not less than 0.5 when using both eyes together.
  - (b) The horizontal field of vision of the person shall not be less than 150°
  - (c) A person with sight in one eye shall have a visual acuity (with corrective lenses where necessary) of not less than 0.6, and unrestricted field of vision in the eye concerned and the monocular vision must have existed for sufficient time to allow adaptation.
  - (d) When the wearing of corrective lenses is necessary for driving, this shall be recorded on the eyesight report.
3. In the case of an applicant for a licence to drive vehicles of category C1, C, D1, D, EC1, EC, ED1 or ED whose first licence in any of said categories was granted before 8<sup>th</sup> November 1999 –

- (a) the person shall have a binocular vision with a visual acuity (with corrective lenses where necessary) of at least 0.75 in the better eye and of at least 0.5 in the worse eye; if corrective lenses are used, the uncorrected vision must be not less than 0.1 and the correction must be tolerated;
  - (b) fitness to drive shall not be certified if, on examination, it is found that the applicant has a restricted field of vision, diplopia or defective binocular vision.
4. In the case of an applicant for a licence to drive vehicles of category C1, C, D1, D, EC1, ED1, or ED whose first licence in any of said categories was granted on or after 8<sup>th</sup> November, 1999 –
- (a) the person shall have a binocular vision with a visual acuity (with corrective lenses where necessary) of at least 0.8 in the better eye and at least 0.5 in the worse eye. If corrective lenses are used to attain the values of 0.8 and 0.5 the uncorrected acuity in each eye must read 0.05, or else the minimum acuity (0.8 and 0.5) must be achieved either by correction by means of glasses with a power not exceeding plus or minus 8 dioptries, or with the aid of contact lenses.

The correction must be well tolerated;

- (b) fitness to drive shall not be certified in respect of applicants without a normal binocular field of vision or suffering from diplopia.
5. In the case of an applicant for a driving licence to drive vehicles of any category, who is aged 40 years or more and who has sub-normal vision after correction but nevertheless meets the minimum requirements set out in paragraph 2, 3 or 4 of this Part of this Schedule, as applicable, the cause of loss of vision shall be investigated before the person is certified as fit to drive. Where a disease of the eye is discovered or suspected, the report shall recommend periodic tests at appropriate intervals.

**1. General**

- (1) In the case of an applicant for a licence to drive a vehicle of any category, the medical examination shall take account of the following aspects of the applicant's physical and mental condition:

ear conditions (vertigo and labyrinthine conditions),  
general physique and physical disabilities;  
Condition of cardiovascular system,  
Condition of haemopoietic system,  
Condition of endocrine system,

Condition of respiratory system,  
Condition of gastro-intestinal system,  
Condition of genito-urinary system,  
Condition of nervous system,  
Condition of mental system,

In so far as any condition of abnormality in any one or more of these aspects would affect such person's fitness to drive safely vehicles of that category having regard to –

- (a) the ability of the person concerned, both physically and mentally, to operate efficiently and safely the controls of the vehicles and to continue so to operate the controls over a reasonable period,
  - (b) the susceptibility of the person concerned to sudden incapacity, such as loss of consciousness, fainting or giddiness, which might affect such person's ability to operate the controls of the vehicle so as to bring the vehicle to stop safely, and
  - (c) the susceptibility of the person concerned to fatigue such that such person's ability to operate the controls of the vehicle might be seriously impaired.
- (2) Fitness to drive shall not be certified in the case of an applicant to drive a vehicle of any category who suffers from any condition or abnormality in anyone or more of the aspects of such person's Physical or Mental condition set out in sub paragraph (1) of this paragraph to such extent that the driving by the applicant of vehicles of the category to which the application relates would be a danger to the applicant or other road users.
- (3) Special attention shall be paid to the additional risks and dangers involved in driving vehicles of category C1, C, D1, D, EC1, EC, ED1 or ED.

## ***2. General Physique and Physical Disabilities.***

- (1) As a general rule, fitness to drive shall not be certified in respect of persons suffering from complaints or abnormalities of the locomotor system which make it dangerous for them to drive a power-driven vehicle.
- (2) In the case of an applicant for a licence to drive vehicles of category A1, A, B, EB, M or W, fitness to drive may be certified in respect of physically handicapped persons subject to periodic medical review.

Where a person is suffering from a progressive complaint, fitness to drive may be certified on condition that the disabled person is regularly examined to check that the person concerned is still capable of driving the vehicle efficiently and safely.

- (3) In the case of an applicant for a licence to drive vehicles of category C1, C, D1, D, EC1, EC, ED, ED1 or ED, the medical examination shall cover the full range of body movements – strength, control and co-ordination - and in particular, movements of the upper and lower limbs. Fitness to drive shall not be certified if the applicant has any disablement which is likely to prevent the proper and safe control of such vehicles.

### *3. Hearing*

In the case of an applicant for a licence to drive a vehicle of category C1, C, D, D1, EC1, EC, ED1 or ED, fitness to drive shall not be certified if the applicant's hearing is so deficient that it interferes with the proper discharge of his duties as a driver.

### *4. Cardiovascular Diseases*

- (1) Any disease capable of exposing an applicant for a first licence or a driver applying for a renewal of a licence to a sudden failure of the cardiovascular system such that there is a sudden impairment of the cerebral functions constitutes a danger to road safety.
- (2) In the case of an applicant for a licence to drive vehicles of category A1, A, B, EB, M or W, the following should be noted –
  - (a) fitness to drive shall not be certified if the applicant suffers from serious arrhythmia resulting in loss of consciousness. In this connection, persons with ventricular tachyarrhythmias treated by an implantable cardioverter-defibrillator (ICD) have an ongoing risk of sudden incapacitation that might cause harm to others while driving. Such persons with New York Heart Functional Class III shall not be certified as being fit to drive. However, fitness to drive may be certified in respect of such patients with New York Heart Functional Class I or II subject to – (i) certification by a consultant cardiologist, and (ii) regular medical review

- (b) fitness to drive may be certified in respect of persons wearing a pacemaker subject to regular medical review:
  - (c) the question whether to certify a person suffering from abnormal arterial blood pressure as being fit to drive shall be assessed with reference to the other results of the medical examination, any associated complications and the danger they might constitute to road safety; and
  - (d) generally speaking, fitness to drive shall not be certified in respect of persons suffering from angina during rest or emotion. Persons who have suffered myocardial infarction may be certified as being fit to drive subject to regular medical review.
- (3) In the case of an applicant for a licence to drive vehicles of category C1, C, D1, D, EC1, EC, ED1 or ED who suffers from cardiovascular diseases, the medical examination shall take due account of the additional risks and dangers involved in the driving of such vehicles.

**5. *Endocrine Disorders.***

- (1) In the case of an applicant for a licence to drive vehicles of category A1, A, B, EB, M or W who suffers from diabetes, fitness to drive may be certified for a limited period only so as to ensure that the applicant remains under medical supervision.
- (2) In the case of an applicant for a licence to drive vehicles of category C1, C, D1, D, EC1, EC, ED1 or ED who suffers from diabetes, fitness to drive may be certified for a limited period only so as to ensure that the applicant remains under medical supervision. However, persons who suffer from diabetes which requires insulin treatment may only in very exceptional cases be certified as being fit to drive vehicles of any of the categories mentioned above. This latter shall be subject to – (i) certification by a consultant specialist in endocrinology with a special interest in diabetes, and (ii) annual medical review.
- (3) In the case of an applicant for a licence to drive vehicles of any category, fitness to drive shall not be certified where the applicant suffers from a severe endocrine disorder, other than diabetes, to such extent that the driving by the applicant of the vehicles to which the application relates would be a danger to the applicant or other road users.

## 6. *Diseases of the Nervous System*

- (1) In the case of an applicant for a licence to drive a vehicle of any category who suffers from -
- (a) encephalitis, multiple sclerosis, myasthenia gravis or hereditary diseases of the nervous system associated with progressive muscular atrophy and congenital myotonic disorders,
  - (b) diseases of the peripheral nervous system, or
  - (c) trauma of the central or peripheral nervous system,

fitness to drive shall be certified for a limited period only so as to ensure that the applicant remains under medical supervision.

Neurological disturbances associated with diseases or surgical intervention affecting the central or peripheral nervous system, which lead to sensory or motor deficiencies and affect balance and co-ordination, must be taken into account in relation to their functional effects and the risks of progression. In such cases and in the event of risk of deterioration, fitness to drive shall be for a limited period only.

- (2) In the case of an applicant for a licence to drive a vehicle of any category who suffers, or has suffered in the past, from epilepsy, fitness to drive
- (a) may be certified for a limited period in relation to vehicles of category A1, A, B, EB, M or W, where the applicant
    - has not suffered any epileptic attack during the 12 month period preceding the date of medical examination,
    - has only had nocturnal seizures over a period of 2 years preceding the date of medical examination, and certification is by a consultant neurologist,
    - has only had a single provoked seizure and such seizure was prior to the 6 month period preceding the date of medical examination, and certification is by a consultant neurologist, or
    - has only had simple partial seizures where awareness is fully maintained at all times, and certification is by a consultant neurologist and
  - (b) shall not be certified in relation to vehicles of category CI, C, D1, D, ECI, EC,ED1, or ED.
- (3) In the case of an applicant for a licence to drive vehicles of Category A1, A, B, EB, M or W who suffers from a cerebrovascular disease, fitness to drive may be certified –
- (a) provided that, where necessary, the controls of the vehicle to be driven are suitably rearranged or modified or a suitable special type of vehicle is used, and
  - (b) for a limited period only so as to ensure that the applicant remains under medical supervision.

- (4) In the case of an applicant for a licence to drive vehicles of category A1, A, B, EB, M or W who has suffered a lesion with damage to the spinal cord and resultant paraplegia, fitness to drive may be certified subject to the vehicle to be driven being fitted with special controls.
- (5) In the case of an applicant for a licence to drive vehicles of category C1, C, D1, D, EC1, EC, ED1 or ED, fitness to drive shall not be certified where the applicant suffers, or has at any time suffered, from a cerebrovascular disease, or a lesion with damage to the spinal cord and resultant paraplegia.

## **7. *Mental Disorders***

- (1) In the case of an applicant for a licence to drive vehicle of category A1, A, B, EB, M or W, the medical examination shall take due account of:-
  - (a) severe mental disturbance, whether congenital or due to disease, trauma or neurosurgical operation on the central nervous system;
  - (b) severe mental retardation;
  - (c) psychosis, which in particular has caused general paralysis; or
  - (d) severe behavioural problems due to dementia; psychoneurosis; or personality defects or disorders leading to seriously impaired judgement, behaviour or adaptability.

If necessary, certification shall be for a limited period only.

- (2) In the case of an applicant for a licence to drive vehicles of category C1, C, D1, D, EC1, EC, ED1, or ED who suffers from any of the disorders outlined in (1) above, the medical examination shall take due account of the additional risks and dangers involved in the driving of such vehicles.

## **8. *Alcohol***

In the case of an applicant for a licence to drive vehicles of any category who suffers from or has suffered in the past from alcoholism, fitness to drive may be certified for a limited period only, so as to ensure that the applicant remains under medical supervision.

## **9. *Drugs (prescription and illicit) and Medications***

### **(1) Abuse:**

In the case of an applicant for a licence to drive vehicles of any category, fitness to drive shall not be certified if the person concerned is dependent on psychotropic substances or, if the person is not dependent on such substances, regularly abuses them.

### **(2) Regular Use:**

- (a)** In the case of an applicant for a licence to drive vehicles of category A1, A, B, EB, M or W, fitness to drive shall not be certified if the person concerned regularly uses psychotropic substances, in whatever form, which can hamper the ability to drive safely where the quantities absorbed are such as to have an adverse effect on driving. This shall apply to all other medications or combinations of medications which affect the ability to drive.
- (b)** In the case of an applicant for a licence to drive vehicles of category C1, C, D1, D, EC1, EC, ED1 or ED who regularly uses psychotropic substances or medications, the medical examination shall take due account of the additional risks and dangers involved in the driving of such vehicles.

## **10. *Diseases of the Blood***

In the case of an applicant for a licence to drive a vehicle of any category, special attention shall be paid to serious diseases of the blood.

## **11. *Renal Disorders***

- (1)** In the case of an applicant for a licence to drive vehicles of any category, fitness to drive shall not be certified where the applicant suffers from severe renal deficiency to such extent that the driving by the applicant of vehicles of the category to which the application relates would be a danger to the applicant or to other road users.

## **12. *Miscellaneous Provisions***

- (1)** In the case of an applicant for a licence to drive vehicles of category A1, A, B, EB, M or W who has had an organ transplant or an artificial implant which affects the ability to drive, fitness to drive may be certified subject to periodic medical review. Fitness to drive may also be certified in respect of such persons to drive vehicles of category C1, C, D1, D, EC1, EC, ED1 or ED but due account should be taken of the additional risks and dangers involved in the driving of such vehicles.

- (2) As a general rule, where an applicant for a licence to drive a vehicle of any category suffers from any disorder not mentioned in subparagraph (1) above which gives rise to, or is likely to result in, a functional incapacity affecting safety at the wheel, the medical examination shall take due account of the risks and dangers involved in the driving of the vehicles in question and certification of fitness in such instances shall be subject to periodic medical review.

## VEHICLE ADAPTATIONS

Persons seeking advice on what vehicle adaptations might best suit a particular disability or medical condition or persons with a progressive condition which might require (further) adaptation(s) to a vehicle to enable them to continue driving might be referred to either of the following organisations for appropriate technical advice:-

### Irish Wheelchair Association,

24 Blackheath Drive,  
Clontarf,  
Dublin 3.  
Tel No: 01-8186400

### Disabled Drivers Association,

Ballindine,  
Co Mayo,  
Tel No: 094 9364266