

# Medical conditions and driving



MANITOBA  
PUBLIC INSURANCE

## Medically fit to drive

We know how important driving is to you and your loved ones. Getting behind the wheel of a vehicle gives us a sense of independence and allows us to be connected to our family, friends and community.

Unfortunately, the ability to drive safely can be negatively affected by a variety of factors beyond a person's control. Driving safely requires excellent physical and mental skills, and good judgment. Many medical conditions or disabilities can negatively affect your driving, putting you and others at risk on the road. Some prescription and non-prescription medications can also affect driving ability. Of particular concern are:

- conditions that affect alertness, memory, learning and judgment
- physical disabilities
- cardiovascular disease
- neurological conditions
- mental disorders
- diabetes
- vision problems

If at any time you develop a medical condition or disability, or experience a change in an existing condition, you need to have an open conversation with your physician. Be honest with yourself— are you able to drive safely without putting others on the road at risk?

You must report any change in health or physical condition that's likely to affect your ability to drive. To do this, contact Manitoba Public Insurance's Driver Fitness department at 204-985-1900 or toll-free 1-866-617-6676.



## **Aging is inevitable. It happens to everyone.**

Growing older doesn't have to mean giving up an active life. While aging does impose certain physical limitations, age should never be mistaken as the sole indicator of driving ability. That's why Manitoba drivers of passenger vehicles are not required to complete medical reports or driving tests based solely on age.

However, every driver is an aging driver and the aging process varies from individual to individual. As drivers age, they experience changes in their vision, reflexes, flexibility and hearing. So, while we want to keep older drivers on the road as long as they can drive safely, there must be a balance between the individual's mobility and public safety.

Aging drivers can adjust their driving habits to cope safely with these changes but to do this they must acknowledge their limitations, recognize unsafe driving practices and be aware of actions they can take to make their driving safe.

# Concerned about a loved one's driving?

Are you seeing changes in your loved one's driving behaviour? Noticing a subtle decline in their skills behind the wheel? Perhaps you've observed some of the following:

- dementia or memory problems
- vision problems
- increased reaction time when driving
- limited mobility
- failure to follow the rules of the road
- poor judgment
- reduced physical strength and mobility, which may make it harder to control a vehicle
- adverse effects of medication, including over-the-counter products
- unexplained damage to vehicle (dents, dings, scratches)

If you notice these changes, start by having an open and honest conversation with your loved one about your concerns and what you've seen. Talk about what the next steps might be and encourage them to use a self-assessment tool or test so both of you can better understand their driving abilities and weaknesses. (Find links to some evaluation tools at [mpi.mb.ca](http://mpi.mb.ca).)

If needed, talk to a family physician or health care provider about your concerns. You can also call Manitoba Public Insurance's Driver Fitness department at 204-985-1900 or toll-free 1-866-617-6676. We're here to help.

## Often individuals choose to limit their driving to reduce risk, but other options to consider include:

- a driving course to improve skills behind the wheel
- alternate transportation (e.g. Handi-Transit, bus, vehicles for hire)
- assistance from family or friends to run errands

## When a medical condition is reported

Physicians and optometrists are required by law to report any concerns about a patient's driving ability to Manitoba Public Insurance. Because it is medical conditions that reduce driving competence, physicians are best able to identify drivers who are medically at-risk for having a collision. Therefore, Manitoba Public Insurance relies primarily on reports from physicians in determining whether a driver requires an assessment to ensure their continued ability to drive safely.



After you report a change of health that may affect your driving or we hear from your physician or optometrist, the Driver Fitness department may request additional information. This could include a medical report from your physician or a vision test. In some circumstances, your licence may be temporarily suspended until further medical information is received.

Once information is received, nursing professionals in the Driver Fitness department will determine which of the following actions to take:

- Approve the medical report and allow you to keep driving. Follow-up reports may be required.
- Require you to take a driving test.
- Require you to undergo a comprehensive driving assessment by an occupational therapist.
- Place restrictions on your licence (i.e. limits on when and where you can drive or speeds that you can travel).
- Require you to take a **DriveABLE** assessment (see next page) if there are concerns about your cognitive ability to drive.
- Reclassify your licence to a lower class (i.e. if you are a professional driver and hold a Class 1-4 licence, you may be reclassified to a Class 5 licence).
- Suspend your licence until further information is received.
- Cancel your licence if your health prevents you from driving safely and puts the public in danger. We allow individuals to continue driving as long as road safety is not compromised.

## DriveABLE cognitive assessment

“Cognitive impairment” is a specific phrase used to describe medical changes in the brain that affect function. If your physician indicates concern about your ability to drive due to cognitive impairment, we will require you to take a DriveABLE cognitive assessment. This evaluation of cognitive medical fitness to drive is used in many jurisdictions around the world. It has two distinct parts: an in-office computerized assessment and an on-road evaluation. (The on-road evaluation is not necessary if the driver passes the in-office test.)

Although many medical conditions that affect cognitive abilities are more likely to affect older persons, the requirement for a DriveABLE cognitive assessment is based not on age but on medical condition.

## Appeals

If your licence is cancelled because you no longer meet medical standards for driving, you may appeal the decision to the Medical Review Committee.

The Medical Review Committee is an independent body of health professionals whose purpose is to review the medical decisions made by Manitoba Public Insurance.

The committee will determine if the medical standards for driving were correctly applied and whether an exception could be made without compromising public safety.

### **Medical Review Committee**

200 – 301 Weston Street

Winnipeg MB R3E 3H4

Phone: 204-945-7350

Fax: 204-948-2682

## Voluntary return of licence

If you no longer wish to drive, you may return your driver's licence. To do this, you may take it to a Manitoba Public Insurance Service Centre, your Autopac agent or mail it to us with a letter stating you no longer wish to drive.

If you would still like to have some government-issued photo identification, you can apply for a Manitoba Identification Card at any Autopac agent or Manitoba Public Insurance Service Centre. If you are over the age of 65 and surrendering your driver's licence, you can obtain an identification card at no charge.

## Our specialized department is here to help

Our Driver Fitness department is responsible for assessing drivers' medical fitness to drive safely. This group reviews some 50,000 medical reports each year from physicians and optometrists, as well as reports filed by law enforcement, families or drivers directly. This includes reports from commercial drivers, who are required to file medical information on an ongoing basis to maintain commercial driving privileges in Canada and the United States.

Our policies for assessing medical fitness are based on the *Medical Standards for Drivers* published by the Canadian Council of Motor Transport Administrators.

## The Driver Fitness department includes:

- a medical advisor who provides advice on files, medical standards and policies and procedures, as well as acting as a liaison with the medical community
- medical assessments staff who review medical information and take action as needed
- registered nurses who assess and deal with more complex medical issues

## Learn more

For additional information, contact our Driver Fitness department by calling 204-985-1900 or 1-866-617-6676.





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