

Glaucoma and driving

October 2020

Some medical and eyesight conditions may affect the ability to drive safely. VicRoads Medical Review aims to support drivers to drive at any age so long as they are medically fit to do so.

Good eyesight is essential for driving in order to see and respond to the road and adjacent environment, including other vehicles, signs, signals, pedestrians and hazards.

Good vision is particularly important to safely complete manoeuvres such as changing lanes, merging and negotiating intersections.

This fact sheet provides information about glaucoma and driving, including:

- How this condition may impact safe driving
- How to care for your vision to help you continue driving for as long as possible
- How the VicRoads Medical Review process supports you in managing your condition in relation to driving
- Where to get more information.

What is glaucoma?

Glaucoma is an eye condition that damages the optic nerve and results in gradual and irreversible loss of peripheral (side) vision. It also results in increased sensitivity to light and difficulty seeing at night. It is more common in older people but can occur at any age.

The following images provided by the Vision Initiative show possible visual changes associated with glaucoma compared to normal vision.



Full healthy vision



Glaucoma (indicative only)

Early action improves sight and safety

Vision loss may not be noticed in the early stages of glaucoma and there is no pain or other warning signs, so it is very important to have regular eye checks.

With early detection and treatment, further vision loss can be prevented or slowed. This means you will be able to drive safely for longer.

People over 40 should have the simple and painless glaucoma 'pressure' test when they have their routine eye check (every two years, or yearly if over 65, or as advised by an eye health professional).

If you are diagnosed with glaucoma, your eye health professional will also test the visual field of each eye and then binocular using specialised equipment. The test requires you to respond to lights that flash in various parts of your visual fields. The equipment maps any

areas of vision loss.

You may have periodic visual field tests to monitor any changes to your vision. If VicRoads requests the results of a visual field test, advise your eye health professional when you make an appointment as extra time is required to complete a visual field test.

If you notice any sudden changes in vision between your regular checks, you should see your eye health professional as soon as possible.

How does glaucoma affect driving?

Peripheral vision enables you to see objects "out of the corner of the eye" while looking straight ahead. Drivers with poor peripheral vision may not see a cyclist or car in an adjacent lane or a pedestrian on the roadside. They are more likely to crash than drivers with normal peripheral vision.

Drivers with glaucoma may also have difficulty seeing at night and coping with the glare from headlights. They may therefore need to avoid night driving.

All Victorian drivers are required by law to notify VicRoads if they have a long-term, chronic health condition or disability that could affect their ability to drive safely. This includes conditions affecting vision such as glaucoma.

What do you need to do if you are diagnosed with glaucoma?

It is important to speak to your doctor or eye health professional early on so that you understand your condition and the potential impacts. You might ask about:

- How your condition currently impacts on driving
- What might be long-term impacts on driving

- Whether transitioning to not driving in the future will be required
- How often your eyes and vision should be checked
- Where you can get more information
- Notifying VicRoads about your glaucoma diagnosis.

Notifying VicRoads Medical Review is simple. Ask your eye health professional to complete and submit a VicRoads eyesight form. Keep a record of this report.

Alternatively, you can notify VicRoads by phone, email, fax or mail using the contact details below.

What happens at Medical Review?

When you notify Medical Review about your glaucoma diagnosis, you will be asked to provide a report from your eye health professional which includes binocular visual field maps (if not already submitted). A medical report from your treating doctor may also be required.

The Medical Review team will review the report/s and make a decision about your driving based on the national medical standards ([Assessing Fitness to Drive, Austroads 2016](#)), which include the vision and eye disorder standards for driving.

Most people who report to VicRoads early in their condition continue to drive, but with requirements which aim to maintain road safety, such as regular eyesight reviews.

What is a conditional licence?

Conditional licences permit driving under circumstances that suit the capacity of the driver. For example, with glaucoma, you may be able to continue to drive with restrictions such as:

- Wearing corrective lenses
- Driving only in daylight hours
- Driving only in local familiar areas
- Having regular vision reviews with your eye health professional to check that your vision continues to meet the required standards.

This approach helps you to continue to drive for as long as you are safe to do so. It also helps you to plan for when you may no longer be safe to drive.

VicRoads will contact you to advise you of the Medical Review outcome, next steps or to request further information.

Drivers of commercial vehicles

Due to the nature of their work, drivers of commercial vehicles such as trucks, taxis, hire cars and buses are required to meet stricter visual standards than private vehicle drivers.

Sometimes a driver with glaucoma may not be able to drive a commercial vehicle, while still being able to drive a private car. Your eye health professional and the VicRoads Medical Review team will provide case by case advice in such circumstances.

More about glaucoma

Glaucoma damages the optic nerve at the back of the eye. In most people this damage is due to increased pressure inside the eye. In others, the damage may be caused by poor blood supply to the optic nerve, a weakness in the structure of the nerve, and/or a problem with the health of the nerve fibres themselves.

Are you at risk of glaucoma?

It is estimated that up to 300,000 Australians may have glaucoma, but half of them do not know they have the condition and therefore are not receiving sight-saving treatment.

Glaucoma is more common as people age, however it can occur at any age and some people are more at risk than others.

You are more at risk if you:

- have a blood relative with glaucoma,
- are short-sighted (myopia) or long-sighted (hyperopia),
- have diabetes and/or high blood pressure,
- have suffered a previous eye injury,
- have used cortisone drugs (steroids) over an extensive period, or

- suffer from migraine and/or poor circulation.

Discuss these risk factors with your eye health professional so that they can recommend more frequent testing if required.

Remember, there is no simple way of checking for glaucoma yourself, so regular eye checks are strongly recommended.

What are the treatment options?

Once glaucoma is detected, treatment can usually prevent, or at least slow further loss of sight.

Treatment usually involves long term use of prescribed eye drops to reduce the pressure inside the eye. It is normal to have some blurriness or watery eyes immediately after administering the drops and driving should be avoided until you can see clearly.

Regular monitoring by your eye health professional will minimise vision loss, support your safety when driving, and optimise your ability to have good vision and drive for as long as possible.

Where can you get more information?

Glaucoma Australia

Glaucoma Australia is a national organisation that provides information and support to glaucoma sufferers and their families, raises public awareness of the condition, and supports glaucoma research.

Website: www.glaucoma.org.au

Email: glaucoma@glaucoma.org.au

Phone: 1800 500 880

Mail: PO Box 420, Crows Nest NSW 1585

VicRoads Medical Review

Website: vicroads.vic.gov.au

Email: medicalreview@roads.vic.gov.au

Phone: (03) 8391 3226 or VicRoads on 13 11 71 (TTY 13 36 77, Speak and Listen 1300 555 727).

Fax: (03) 9854 2307

Mail: Medical Review, PO Box 2504, Kew 3101 VIC

Vision Initiative

Website: www.visioninitiative.org.au/