

Vision and Driving

May 2019

VicRoads vision is to create a safe system of roads, laws, vehicles, drivers and behaviour that supports and improves the safe movement of our community. This includes supporting drivers to drive at any age so long as they are medically fit to do so.

This fact sheet explains your fitness to drive reporting obligations, common eyesight conditions, how they may impact safety when driving and where to obtain further information.

Some medical and eyesight conditions may affect the ability to drive safely. VicRoads encourages people with eyesight conditions to speak to their doctor and eye specialist to understand their condition and potential impact on driving.

What are my obligations?

Drivers are required by law to notify VicRoads if they have a long-term, chronic health condition or disability that could affect the ability to drive safely. This includes conditions affecting vision.

VicRoads determines a drivers' fitness to drive on a case by case basis in accordance with national medical guidelines (*Austrroads Assessing Fitness to Drive Guidelines* 2016). Medical advice and assessment outcomes are also considered. Each driver is reviewed to determine the outcome that is best for individual and community safety.

Your vision must meet certain standards for driving. To ensure your eyesight meets the standards, an eye test with an optometrist or ophthalmologist is recommended. Eye tests are recommended every 2 years or more

frequently depending on your age or health conditions.

Why are regular eyesight checks important?

Good eyesight is essential for driving safely. Changes in vision occur as a normal part of ageing and as a consequence of some health conditions. For example, night vision gradually deteriorates from ~40 years and eye health is impacted by conditions such as diabetes, cataracts and glaucoma which are more common as we age. Regular eye tests can monitor changes in vision.

If you can show that you can drive safely, but only under certain conditions, a conditional licence may be considered. This may include wearing corrective eye glasses, driving in daylight hours or only in certain areas.

Common eye conditions

The seven most common eye conditions causing vision impairment reported to VicRoads Medical Review are described below. Their potential impact on safe driving is also explained.

1. Reduced Visual acuity

Visual acuity is the term used to describe the sharpness of your vision. It is measured by how well you can read the letters on a standard eye chart. Normal visual acuity is regarded as being able to read the line 6/6 (previously 20/20 vision). The legal limit for holding a private driver licence is being able to read the 6/12 line or better (using both eyes). If you need to wear corrective lenses to read the 6/12 line, a condition will be placed on your licence requiring you to wear corrective lenses when driving.

Good visual acuity is important when driving to see the road environment in the distance and read dashboard displays inside the car. Drivers with poor

visual acuity have difficulty reading street signs and detecting objects in the distance.

2. Cataracts

A cataract is a clouding of the eye lens and is a leading cause of vision impairment, common with ageing. Symptoms associated with cataracts include:

- blurred vision
- sensitivity to glare and bright lights
- distortion or double vision in the eye with the cataract
- a feeling of looking through a veil or curtain

These effects on vision make distinguishing objects against similar coloured backgrounds (such as a pedestrian wearing dark clothing at dusk) and night driving difficult. In the early stages vision may improve through use of corrective lenses. In more advanced cases, cataract surgery is very successful in restoring vision.

3. Glaucoma

Glaucoma is an eye disease, common in older age groups, which can damage the optic nerve. It is usually due to increased pressure inside the eye and may result in gradual loss of peripheral (side) vision. As there are no warning signs, loss of sight may not be noticed.

Peripheral vision enables us 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 pedestrian on the roadside. Such drivers are more at risk of crashing than drivers with normal peripheral vision. Once glaucoma is detected, treatment can usually prevent or slow further loss of sight. For more information refer to

Glaucoma Australia

Call: 1800 500 880

Email: glaucoma@glaucoma.org.au

Website: glaucoma.org.au

4. Diabetic retinopathy

Adults with diabetes should have an eye examination at least every two years or more frequently if recommended by the eye specialist or if there is a sudden change in vision.

Diabetic retinopathy is caused by damaged blood vessels and can develop as a complication of diabetes. It usually affects both eyes and is the leading cause of preventable blindness in working age Australians.

Symptoms can include seeing spots or dark strings floating in your vision, dark or empty patches where you can't see, blurred or fluctuating vision and impaired colour vision. These effects may impact on your ability to drive safely.

5. Visual field loss

Your visual fields refer to the area you can see and are measured by the extent of your peripheral (side) vision. Visual fields may be reduced as a result of an eye injury or some medical conditions such as a stroke. If the visual field loss is severe, you may not meet the national eyesight standards to drive a car. The extent of the visual field loss can only be assessed formally by eye specialists using specialised equipment.

A driver with significant visual field defects may not see a pedestrian or vehicle approaching from the side. They may be unable to maintain an awareness of the total traffic environment or safely manage tasks such as merging or lane-changing.

6. Loss of vision in one eye

A person who has lost the vision in one eye will have difficulty with depth perception and a reduced visual field. Depth perception is very important for safe driving as it enables us to judge distances between objects/ vehicles.

Loss of vision in one eye impacts a person's fitness to drive and requires an adjustment period to the visual changes. This can take a few months. Your health professional can assist with compensation techniques to transition back to driving, providing your eyesight meets national fitness to drive standards.

7. Macular degeneration

Macular degeneration is the leading cause of blindness in Australia. The disease affects the central part of the retina (called the macula) and causes progressive loss of central vision. Often peripheral or side vision is left intact. This means you can't see objects directly in front of you. Macular degeneration affects the ability to read, drive, recognise faces and perform activities that require good vision.

Macular Disease Foundation Australia

Call: 1800 111 709

Email: info@mdfoundation.com.au

Website: mdfoundation.com.au

The images below provided by Vision 2020 Initiative are indicative of possible visual changes with some conditions.



Full Healthy Vision



Age-related macular degeneration



Diabetic retinopathy



Cataracts



Glaucoma

For more information on eye health and vision care refer to **Vision2020**: Vision2020initiative.org.au

How will VicRoads assess my fitness to drive?

VicRoads will review the information reported by an optometrist or ophthalmologist using the national fitness to drive standards. In addition, a medical report from your doctor or a practical driving test may be required. Eyesight and medical report forms are available on VicRoads website.

VicRoads will generally contact you by post to advise you of the review outcome, next steps or request further information.

Drivers of commercial vehicles

Fitness to drive vision standards for commercial truck, taxi, car hire and bus drivers are stricter than those for car drivers. If you have a permanent, long term vision impairment, you must discuss your condition with your doctor and provide a medical report to VicRoads.

VicRoads will advise you if you need to provide an eyesight report from an ophthalmologist or optometrist, and if particular tests are required (e.g. to assess visual fields).

Where can I get further information?

Further information about medical review is available on the VicRoads website: vicroads.vic.gov.au or by calling VicRoads on 13 11 71 (TTY 13 36 77, Speak and Listen 1300 555 727).

VicRoads Medical Review contact details:

Email medicalreview@roads.vic.gov.au

Phone (03) 8391 3226

Fax (03) 9854 2307

Mail Medical Review

PO Box 2504, Kew VIC 3101

Further information about vision is available from

Good Vision For Life:

<https://goodvisionforlife.com.au/>