



# YOUR HEALTH AND DRIVING SAFELY IN MASSACHUSETTS



REGISTRY OF MOTOR VEHICLES

# INTRODUCTION

The Massachusetts Registry of Motor Vehicles (RMV) created this brochure to familiarize you with the minimum physical and cognitive medical standards for safe driving. It also highlights proactive steps you can take to prevent impaired driving and to keep you driving safely for as long as possible. It introduces you to warning signs of medically impaired driving and how to report an individual to the RMV whose medical condition may adversely affect their ability to operate a motor vehicle.

In addition, there are listings of driver rehabilitation programs that offer evaluations and training, as well as descriptions of alternative forms of transportation available to get you where you need to go.



## KEY FINDINGS AND STATISTICS



According to the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety (2014), medical conditions can affect drivers of all ages. However, drivers between the ages of 65 and 69 are twice as likely to report having a medical condition as drivers between the ages of 24 and 64 years old. Though generally considered a group of safe drivers, motor vehicle operators who are 65 years old and older are more likely to have a medical condition and/or use prescription medications that can affect their driving. Research indicates more than 90% of national drivers above the age of 65 take prescription medications<sup>1</sup>. If you are currently taking prescription or over-the-counter medication and are unsure about how your medicine may impact your ability to drive, please talk with a doctor or medical professional to evaluate whether you are safe to operate a motor vehicle.

The need to ensure that drivers age 65 and older are safe to operate a motor vehicle is becoming more present as this age demographic increases disproportionately to the number of total drivers in the Commonwealth. The number of drivers 65 years-old and older has increased by 58% since 1999, while the total number of drivers has only increased by 17%. This statistic is notable because older drivers have a higher crash rate per mile driven than all age groups except for the youngest drivers<sup>2</sup>, which is likely due to the fact that medical conditions which may affect driving ability are more likely to develop in older drivers.

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<sup>1</sup> Rosenbloom, S. & Santos, R. (2014). *Understanding Older Drivers: An Examination of Medical Conditions, Medication Use, and Travel Behavior*. AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety.

<sup>2</sup> Li, G. "Longitudinal Research on Aging Drivers (Longroad): Study Design and Methods." *Innovation in Aging*, 2017, pp. 1262-1263.

# EVALUATING YOUR DRIVING SKILLS



Driving is a multifaceted activity that requires using diverse cognitive thinking skills as well as specific levels of physical strength, flexibility, and coordination. It is important to take the responsibility of driving seriously and recognize how changes in both mental and physical abilities can affect driving.

An individual may be an excellent driver for many years, until a new medical condition arises or an age-related chronic illness develops such as cardiovascular disease, arthritis, cataract, osteoporosis, diabetes, dementia, and Alzheimer's disease, that can impact your ability to operate a motor vehicle safely.

Driving is a privilege, not a right. As a driver, you can play an important role in making that determination.

# WARNING SIGNS

Signs of unsafe driving can appear gradually or quickly as a result changes in medical status. Here are some warning signs to help you identify if you have a condition that might impair your driving.

- Unable to see clearly
- Frequently getting lost on once familiar roads
- Headlights from other motor vehicles obstructing your sight
- Forgetting the driving basics
- Being intimidated by passing motor vehicles
- Unsure of your parking skills
- Straining to read road signs
- Unsure of your reflexes and reaction time
- Trouble following construction detours
- Finding it difficult to react quickly in certain situations
- Problems with range of motion when needing to look back or to the side quickly
- Driving at inappropriate speeds
- Experiencing frequent close calls (almost crashing) or being frequently honked at
- Becoming drowsy behind the wheel or having difficulty concentrating
- Receiving an increase in the number of driving citations
- Struggling to hear other motor vehicles or train whistles instead of using your vision
- Having family, friends, or police officers tell you that you are not a safe driver
- Difficulty feeling feet, foot slipping off the gas or brake, or confusing gas and brake pedal
- Driving in a non-traditional manner following a physical impairment when adaptive driving equipment may be needed (ex. driving with one hand, using the left foot for gas and brake, driving with a prosthesis)

# MEDICAL CONDITIONS



To keep you and your fellow motorists safe, the Massachusetts Registry of Motor Vehicles (RMV) consulted with medical experts on the Medical Advisory Board to establish a set of minimum physical and cognitive standards for operating a motor vehicle. These standards apply to all licensed drivers and new applicants, while other standards may apply to commercial drivers.

The established minimum standards apply to the following six (6) categories:

- 1 Vision
- 2 Seizure/Loss of Consciousness
- 3 Cardiovascular Condition
- 4 Pulmonary/Respiratory Condition
- 5 Musculoskeletal Impairment
- 6 Cognitive Impairment

Each category has more detailed and technical specifications that every driver must meet to operate a motor vehicle.

To learn more about these specifications, please visit:

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/medical-standards-for-passenger-class-d-and-motorcycle-class-m-drivers-licenses>

or call 857-368-8020.

# HAVING CONVERSATIONS WITH A FAMILY MEMBER OR CLOSE FRIEND ABOUT DRIVING

Often drivers are not the most objective evaluators of his or her own level of operator impairment. Talking to a family member or friend may seem difficult or uncomfortable, however there are resources available to assist with having the challenging conversation.



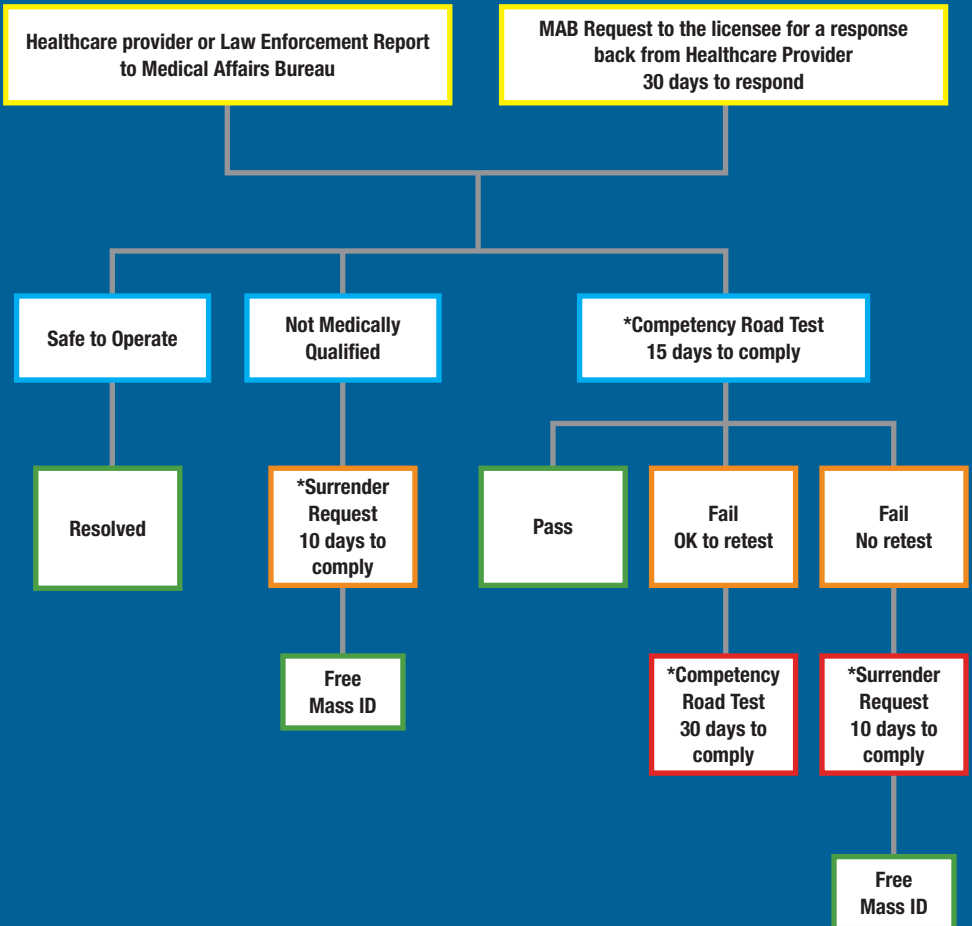
A law enforcement official or healthcare provider, may send a report in good faith, with underlying information based in their own personal evidence or observations to the RMV. The RMV’s Medical Affairs Bureau may seek further information from a healthcare provider regarding the reported individual’s ability to continue driving safely or need for further evaluation.

Based on the information received, the Medical Affairs Bureau may or may not take a licensing action. The RMV cannot guarantee anonymity. Massachusetts has a public records law and a copy of this form will be released if a written request as to what initiated the RMV action is received from the licensee.

To learn more about reporting a medically impaired driver, please visit: <https://www.mass.gov/how-to/report-a-medically-impaired-driver>

\*\* ‘Healthcare provider’ is defined as a ‘registered nurse, licensed practical nurse, physician, physician’s assistant, psychologist, occupational therapist, optometrist, ophthalmologist, osteopath, podiatrist, or physical therapist who is a licensed healthcare provider under the provisions of M.G.L., Chapter 112.’

# Reporting Process Diagram



\*If non-compliant with MAB request, case is forwarded to Driver Control Unit  
In addition, MAB and DCU decisions can be subject to the RMV's Board of Appeals process.



## MASSACHUSETTS POLICY



Massachusetts is a self-reporting state, which means that it is the license holder's responsibility to report to the RMV any medical condition that may adversely affect one's ability to drive. However, medical providers and law enforcement officers are encouraged to report unfit drivers as well.

## REPORTING A MEDICALLY IMPAIRED DRIVER

Massachusetts uses a system of self-reporting where citizens can report themselves to the RMV if they feel they have a medical condition that is poorly affecting their ability to operate a vehicle safely. Understand that a medical diagnosis alone will not result in a licensing action being taken, but rather how your medical condition affects your functional ability to operate a motor vehicle safely will be determined. In addition, law enforcement and healthcare providers can report individuals that they believe to be unfit to operate a motor vehicle. To improve roadway safety for everyone, medical reporting assists the RMV in determining whether those individuals who are applying for a driver's license or those individuals already possessing a driver's license are medically qualified to safely operate a motor vehicle. The public has a right to protection from property loss, injury and even death caused by drivers with medical conditions that limit their ability to drive safely. The RMV's medical reporting process plays a vital role in providing this safeguard.

All reports must be in writing and must be signed by the person making the report.

# DRIVER REHABILITATION EVALUATION AND DRIVER TRAINING PROGRAMS



There are many driver rehabilitation programs within the Commonwealth area that offer driver evaluations and training.

These facilities include:

## DRIVING EVALUATION PROGRAMS

### **\*Adaptive Driving Program, Inc.**

250 Milton Street, Suite LL002  
Dedham, MA 02026  
508-626-6568

### **Berkshire Medical Center**

725 North Street  
Pittsfield, MA 01201  
413-447-2234  
[www.berkshirehealthsystems.org/  
driver-evaluation](http://www.berkshirehealthsystems.org/driver-evaluation)

### **Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center DriveWise Program**

300 Brookline Avenue  
Boston, MA 02215  
617-667-4074

### **Driving Solutions**

508-878-9583  
[www.drivingsolutionsforyou.com/  
contact-us/](http://www.drivingsolutionsforyou.com/contact-us/)

### **DriverAbility at Exeter Hospital**

4 Alumni Drive  
Exeter, NH 03833  
603-580-7927  
[driveability@ehr.org](mailto:driveability@ehr.org)

### **Emerson Hospital Center for Rehabilitative and Sports Therapies**

**Keys to Independence Program**  
310 Baker Avenue  
Concord, MA 01742  
978-287-8244

### **Newton-Wellesley Hospital**

159 Wells Avenue  
Newton, MA 02459  
617-243-6172

### **Northeast Rehabilitation Hospital**

70 Butler Street  
Salem, NH 03079  
603-893-2900

**\*Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital**

300 First Avenue  
Charlestown, MA 02129  
617-952-6200

**\*Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital Cape Cod**

311 Service Road  
East Sandwich, MA 02537  
508-833-4141 Sandwich  
508-240-7203 Orleans

**Spaulding Rehabilitation Outpatient Center**

35 Congress Street, Suite 211  
Salem, MA 01970  
978-825-8700  
<https://spauldingrehab.org/locations/salem-outpatient>

**VA New England Healthcare System**

940 Belmont Avenue  
Brockton, MA 02301  
508-583-4500

**\*Weldon Center for Rehabilitation**

175 Carew Street  
Springfield, MA 01104  
413-748-6880  
<https://www.mercycares.com/driver-advisement>

**Whittier Rehabilitation Hospital**

145 Ward Hill Avenue  
Bradford, MA 01835  
978-372-8000

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## DRIVER TRAINING PROGRAMS

**AAA Senior Driving**

<http://seniordriving.aaa.com/> or  
call your local AAA office

**AARP Smart Driver Course**

888-687-2277

**\*Central Massachusetts Safety Council West Boylston, MA**

508-835-2333 x23

**Safety Council of Western NE**

1000 Wilbraham Road  
Springfield, MA 01109  
413-783-1632

**In Control Advanced Driver Training**

188 Main Street, Suite 202  
Wilmington, MA 01887  
978-658-4144

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\* Certified Driver Rehabilitation Specialist

## **ADAPTIVE EQUIPMENT AND VEHICLE MODIFICATIONS**

The ability to operate a motor vehicle safely plays an important part in a person's overall independence. Adaptive driving makes it possible for individuals with mobility impairments to drive vehicles easily and safely with the use of assistive technologies. These vehicle technologies can include, but are not limited to, adaptive hand controls, touch ignition pads and gear shifts, pedal extensions, driver seat modifications, lowered floors, accessibility ramps, and lifts.

The first step in acquiring adaptive equipment or beginning vehicle modifications is an evaluation from a qualified driver evaluator/trainer. This will determine your basic driving set up, specific modifications, and driving equipment to match your needs. The evaluation may also assess your visual perception, muscle strength, flexibility and range of motion, hand-eye coordination and reaction time, judgement and decision making, and your ability to handle adaptive equipment. The driver evaluator/trainer may also take into the account any prescription medications used by a potential driver.

While purchasing an accessible vehicle can open doors when it comes to freedom and mobility, many drivers may need additional assistance in affording such a vehicle.

To find a qualified adaptive driving evaluator/trainer or modifier/equipment installer, please contact MRC or contact the Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists (ADED) or the National Mobility Equipment Dealers Association (NMEDA). NMEDA offers information on vehicle manufacturer rebate programs toward installation of adaptive equipment and special financing programs for mobility vehicles. Many dealerships offer competitive rates and custom-structured programs specially configured for those trying to purchase an accessible vehicle or mobility equipment. While purchasing an accessible vehicle can open doors when it comes to freedom and mobility, many of us may need additional assistance in affording such a vehicle.

Additionally, Easterseals of Massachusetts administers an Assistive Technology Loan Program (ATLP) that can be used to finance both the vehicle and adaptive modifications. The low-interest loan program helps people with disabilities purchase and borrow technology and other devices to help them live more independently.



## **RESOURCES:**

### **Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC)**

600 Washington Street

Boston, MA 02111

617-204-3600

[www.mass.gov/orgs/massachusetts-rehabilitation-commission](http://www.mass.gov/orgs/massachusetts-rehabilitation-commission)

### **The Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists (ADED)**

P.O. Box 49

Edgerton, WI 53534

608-884-8833

[www.driver-ed.org](http://www.driver-ed.org)

### **National Mobility Equipment Dealers Association (NMEDA)**

909 E. Skagway Avenue

Tampa, FL 33604

800-833-0427

[www.nmeda.org](http://www.nmeda.org)

### **Easterseals of Massachusetts**

484 Main Street,

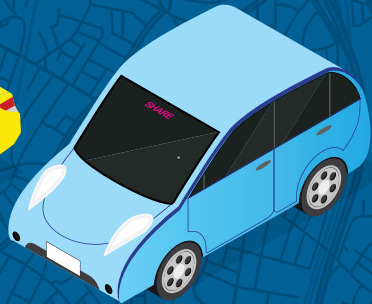
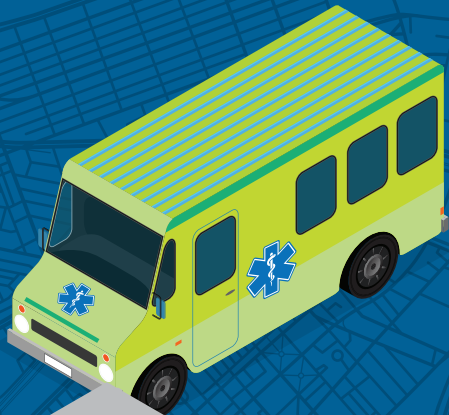
Worcester, MA 01608

800-244-2756

[www.easterseals.com/ma](http://www.easterseals.com/ma)

## CARFIT

CarFit is an educational program developed by AAA, AARP, and American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) that offers older adults the opportunity to check how well their personal vehicles “fit” them. The program also provides information and materials on community-specific resources that could enhance their safety as drivers, and/or increase their mobility in the community. At a CarFit event, a team of trained technicians and/or health professionals work with each participant to ensure they “fit” their vehicle properly for maximum comfort and safety. A CarFit check takes approximately 20 minutes to complete. To locate an event near you, visit [www.car-fit.org/](http://www.car-fit.org/)





## EXPLORE YOUR OPTIONS

If you find that you should no longer be driving, there are plenty of ways to stay mobile without a driver's license.



**MBTA** - offers a variety of subway, commuter rail, ferry, and bus routes throughout the Greater Boston area. Additionally, the MBTA offers free travel training to help seniors and people with disabilities travel independently.

These trainings help travelers learn more about planning trips, reading transportation schedules, boarding and exiting trains and buses, purchasing CharlieCards, general safety and more. For more information on travel training please visit: <https://www.mbta.com/accessibility/travel-training> or call 617-337-2756.



**The RIDE** - is the MBTA's door-to-door, shared-ride paratransit service. The RIDE is operated by the MBTA in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). If you have a disability that prevents you from using the

MBTA bus, subway, or trolley all or some of the time, The RIDE may be able to assist with your public transportation needs. The RIDE is available in 58 cities and towns in Greater Boston area, with similar operating hours to the MBTA - generally from 5:00AM to 1:00AM daily. To access The RIDE, you have to apply and be approved by The RIDE Eligibility Center (TREC). Once you're approved, you can schedule trips from 1 to 7 days in advance. For more information please visit: <https://www.mbta.com/accessibility/the-ride> or call 617-337-2727.



in the search bar.

**Taxi Service** - when traveling a short distance or looking for an easy transportation option, taxis can be a great option. To find a service near your community, search online including “taxi services” and the name of your community



of arrival. Additionally, the trip cost is calculated beforehand and the passenger’s account is automatically charged, so cash is never physically exchanged.

**Private Rideshare Companies** - an easy, way to obtain on-demand transportation. These organizations have free mobile applications available to schedule your trip, track the motor vehicle’s route and receive an estimated time



For more information, contact MassHealth at 1-800-841-2900.

**MassHealth Transportation** - provides eligible MassHealth members with emergency and non-emergency transportation options to medical appointments. To qualify, you must be approved for transportation benefits (PT-1).



be available in your municipality or area.

**Councils on Aging (COAs)** - often provide transportation services to seniors and people with disabilities. Contact the Massachusetts Councils On Aging at <https://mcoaonline.com> or your local COA to learn what options may



your transportation. To learn more visit, <https://www.massoptions.org/massoptions/> and/or call 1-844-422-6277.

**MassOptions** - can connect you to local community-based agencies across the state that serve older adults and people with disabilities. MassOptions can also help you coordinate all of your healthcare needs with



**Ride Match** - an online, searchable database of public and private transportation options across Massachusetts.

Visit [www.massridematch.org](http://www.massridematch.org) to download a list of services operating in your city or town, or use the trip planner to find options that meet your needs.



**Regional Transportation Authorities** -

There are 15 Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs) that provide fixed route and paratransit service in communities across the Commonwealth.

Visit <https://www.mbta.com/accessibility/regional-transportation-authorities> to learn which municipalities are members of each transit authority. Then visit your transit authority's website - or contact them directly - to learn what specific services they may offer to your city or town.

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