

Driving and Glaucoma

Driving is important to maintain freedom and independence but for our own safety and the safety of others, we do need standards of vision to ensure that we can see well enough to be safe on the roads.

Driving standards

The current standards were established in the UK following a publication by the European Commission in 2009. The changes were applied by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA), which is an executive agency of the Department for Transport. Before implementation, the EU recommendations were reviewed by the Secretary of State for Transport's Honorary Advisory Panel for Vision and Driving who gave advice to the DVLA and there was a subsequent public consultation.

The revised regulations came into force in the UK in May 2012 with further changes from March 2013. These changes affect both the visual acuity and visual field requirements for both Group One (cars) and Group Two (larger vehicles).

The minimum visual standards for driving depend on the type of licence in question. This leaflet deals with car drivers (Group One.) For information about the standards for other types of licence, please contact the DVLA on 0300 79 06 806 or all regulations can be viewed on the DVLA website in a publication called "At a glance. Guide to the current Medical Standards of Fitness to Drive". A summary of the current requirements are given below:

Standard 1: Visual acuity

With both eyes open, **the driver should have a visual acuity of at least 6/12, which means seeing at six metres what a person with normal vision can see at 12 metres distance, AND be able to read a standard car number plate at 20 metres** with or without glasses or contact lenses.

Standard 2: Visual field

The driver should have good peripheral vision on both sides and no significant defect in the central vision. The DVLA guidance states the need for the driver to have a binocular horizontal field of vision of 120 degrees minimum **with not less than 50 degrees on each side of the centre and no significant field defect either within or encroaching onto the central 20 degrees from fixation.**

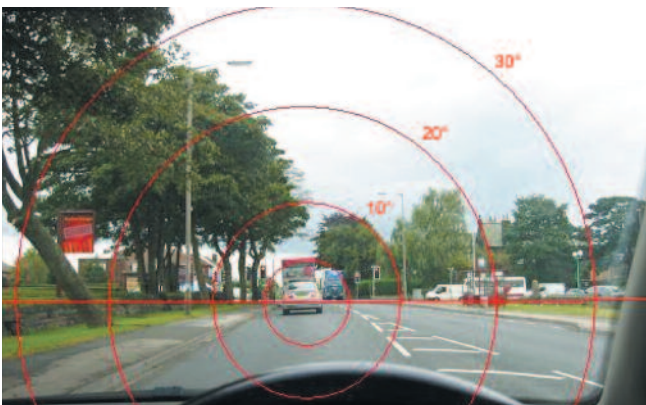


Illustration depicting 20 degrees fixation

Monocular vision: Those with sight in one eye only must meet the same visual acuity and visual field standards as binocular drivers. If there is complete loss of vision in one eye (for Group One drivers this means light cannot be seen at all) then the DVLA should be advised and driving can only be restarted when the individual has been clinically advised that they have adapted to the condition.

Higher standards apply for those holding a bus (PCV) or lorry (LGV) licence (Group Two).

Glaucoma and driving

Glaucoma damages the off centre parts of the field of vision first and does not usually affect the central detailed vision until the late stages of the condition. This off-centre damage can go unnoticed, partly because we use our central vision most of the time and partly because one eye can compensate for the other if the damage is in different areas of the visual field of each eye. The danger comes, especially in driving, when the damaged areas in each eye overlap. Instead of an accurate combined visual picture, the brain fills in the missing parts of the visual image. The gradual onset and adaptation to the loss of vision means there is no awareness of these blind areas but there are potential serious consequences when driving.

Ocular hypertension

Ocular hypertension (raised pressure without visual field loss) does not need to be reported to the DVLA as the visual fields are normal.

Glaucoma in one eye

For Group One drivers, if glaucoma is diagnosed in one eye and the other eye has a normal field of vision then it is not necessary to inform the DVLA. Group Two drivers need to advise the DVLA even if they have glaucoma in one eye only, as tests are more stringent for commercial drivers.

Glaucoma in both eyes

For Group One drivers, the DVLA only needs to be advised of glaucoma when visual field loss affects both eyes.

Responsibilities

It is the driver's responsibility to advise the DVLA of their condition but the medical profession also has a responsibility for public safety and is obliged to take action to inform the DVLA if they know that driving is continuing without the driver advising the DVLA.

DVLA eye test requirements

When the DVLA is advised of the field loss they will require further details about the vision and may arrange for a field of vision test to be carried out at an approved centre. Both the visual field test and the visual acuity test must be carried out by an appropriately qualified and trained operator, in a quiet location, free from distraction with illumination appropriate to the specification for the equipment used.

Visual field test

The test will be performed with both eyes open and will be different from the test usually performed by optometrists or hospital eye departments to assess glaucoma. The frames of glasses can interfere with the peripheral vision so take the advice of the testing technician as to whether glasses should be worn for the test or not. The DVLA can only make a decision based on accurate visual field charts. Customers can take up to three visual field tests if the first or second charts do not comply with accuracy standards.

Visual acuity test

This test will be carried out with each eye separately both with and without glasses or contact lenses and with both eyes together. The test results are sent to the DVLA and it is the DVLA who determines whether the standard has been met or not.

If you are informed the result of your visual field test does not meet the required standard, it is possible to seek a second opinion and have a further visual field test at your own expense and submit this to the DVLA for their consideration. The DVLA will consider the best test result.

Exceptional cases

A driver with a visual field defect which results in the loss of their licence who has a stable defect for more than a year and the defect is due to an isolated and non progressive condition (such as a stroke) and has no other ocular problem may be able to apply to recover their licence. It does require a driving test. Unfortunately this does not apply to patients with glaucoma because glaucoma is not considered to be a stable condition.

Right to appeal

If you were to receive a form from the DVLA withholding or revoking your driving licence, this would include the information regarding your right to appeal and advice on the process to appeal. Appeal can be made to the Magistrates Court of England or Wales or a Sheriff Court in Scotland. It is unusual that these are successful as the magistrates have the strict guidance of the law to follow. Before deciding to appeal, do not hesitate to discuss the matter with your eye specialist or GP to confirm whether or not you have a valid case, because, if you lose your appeal you may have to bear the costs involved.

Driving insurance

It is important to appreciate that insurance cover may become void if an individual fails to meet the medical requirements and if the insured driver with visual field loss in each eye has failed to inform the DVLA of their condition. As long as the DVLA allows continued driving then the insurance companies should not refuse insurance.

Contact details for the DVLA:

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA.) Drivers Customer Services (DCS)
Correspondence Team DVLA, Swansea SA6 7JL

Car Licence Group One call: **0300 79 06 806**

LGV and PVC Group Two call: **0300 79 06 807**

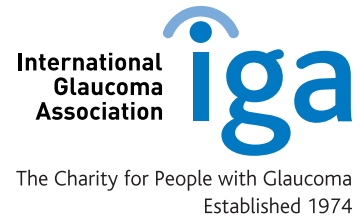
Email: **drivers.dvla@gtnet.gov.uk**

Website: **www.dvla.gov.uk**

We value your feedback, please help us improve our information by sending us your comments about the content and format of this publication at marketing@iga.org.uk or by writing to us at the address above.



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For more information

For a free information pack, or to discuss your glaucoma, please call Sightline on **01233 64 81 70**

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A full list of references and information sources used in the compilation of this leaflet is available on request by phone: 01233 64 81 70 (Sightline) or by email: info@iga.org.uk

Formed in 1974, the IGA has the mission to raise awareness of glaucoma, promote research related to early diagnosis and treatment and to provide support to patients and all those who care for them. Funded entirely by its members and donors (no government or statutory funding) the Association provides its services free of charge to anyone in need of assistance.

If you found this leaflet helpful and would like to support our work, please contact us on 01233 64 81 64 or visit www.glaucoma-association.com to make a donation or become a member (benefits: quarterly magazine, invitations to patient meetings, support research).

This leaflet has been provided to you free of charge thanks to the voluntary donations of our members and friends.

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