

Driving and mental illness

You must tell the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) if you have certain mental illnesses. Or if your medication affects your driving. This factsheet explains how and when to tell the DVLA about your illness or medication. It explains what could happen when you tell the DVLA and how to challenge a decision if you think it is wrong. This factsheet is for people affected by severe mental illness.

Key Points.

- Mental illnesses or medication can sometimes affect how people drive. Some drivers may need to take extra care or may become too unwell to drive.
- If you have certain illnesses, you must tell the DVLA.
- The DVLA will use the information you give them to decide if you should keep your licence.
- They may ask you to have a medical examination or a driving assessment.
- Sometimes they can give you a licence that is valid for 1 to 5 years.
- Sometimes they'll take your licence away. This is also known as 'revoking' it. You can appeal this decision.
- If your doctor says you're not fit to drive, you can give up your licence. This is also known as 'surrendering' your licence. You can reapply for it when your condition has improved.
- If you continue to drive when your doctor says you shouldn't, you could be charged with an offence.
- If you get some benefits, you may be entitled to a Blue Badge.
- You may be entitled to car tax exemption.

This factsheet covers:

1. [When do I have to tell the DVLA about my mental health condition?](#)
2. [Will my medication affect my ability to drive?](#)
3. [How do I tell the DVLA?](#)
4. [When would I give up my driving licence?](#)
5. [How can I reapply for my driving licence?](#)
6. [What happens after I tell the DVLA?](#)
7. [What happens if I don't tell the DVLA?](#)
8. [How can I challenge a decision?](#)
9. [I live with a mental illness. Can I get a Blue Badge?](#)
10. [Do I have to pay car tax if I get a disability benefit?](#)
11. [What if I'm not happy with how my doctor or the DVLA have treated me?](#)

[Top](#)

1. When do I have to tell the DVLA about my mental health condition?

What if I already have a driving licence?

If you have, or think you may have, certain illnesses, you must tell the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA). And you must let them know if your illness has become worse since you got your driving licence.¹

You must tell the DVLA if you live with any of the mental health conditions below, and you're going to drive.²

- Bipolar disorder
- Schizoaffective disorder
- Paranoid schizophrenia
- Psychosis
- Psychotic depression
- Schizophrenia

You must also tell the DVLA if you live with any of the mental health conditions below and they affect your ability to drive safely. Things that might affect your ability to drive safely include suicidal thoughts, poor concentration and feeling agitated or irritable a lot of the time. If you're not sure if your illness affects your ability to drive you must speak to your doctor.³

- Anxiety
- Eating disorders

- Depression
- Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)
- Personality disorder
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

Your doctor should:

- tell you about the impact of your condition on your ability to drive,
- remind you that you must tell the DVLA about your condition or treatment,
- treat you and monitor your condition while considering your fitness to drive, and
- tell the DVLA if you won't or can't tell the DVLA yourself.⁴

The guidance about illnesses and driving are updated regularly by the DVLA.⁵ You might have other physical illness or conditions as well as a mental illness. You can find the DVLA rules on driving and certain illnesses here: www.gov.uk/health-conditions-and-driving.

If you already have a licence, you should tell the DVLA right away. You shouldn't wait for the renewal date.

What if I'm applying for a new licence or renewing one because I'm over 70?

You must tell the DVLA if you have any of these conditions when you're applying for your first licence. And if you're over 70 and renewing your licence. You'll be asked for this information in your application form. You don't need to contact the DVLA separately.⁶

Who else should I talk to about my mental illness and driving?

Your doctor

If you have been diagnosed with a mental illness, you should also speak to your doctor. You should tell them about your illness to see if they think it will cause a problem with driving.

If your doctor thinks you should stop driving but you refuse, they have a duty to tell the DVLA. Even if you don't agree with this. Your doctor should inform you that they plan to tell the DVLA about the mental illness you live with. Your doctor should consider any reasons you have for asking them not to tell the DVLA. If your doctor does tell the DVLA, they should write to you to tell they've done this. They should also make a note on your patient file.⁷

Your insurance company

Your insurance cover could be affected if you drive and haven't told the DVLA about your condition. Or if your doctor tells you not to drive. You should check your policy to see what it says.

If you don't answer a question honestly when asked by your insurance company, it is called 'misrepresentation'. If you do this and your insurance company finds out, the following things could happen.⁸

- Your insurance company could cancel your policy.
- Your policy might be 'void'. This means that if you try to make a claim, your insurance company won't pay. Even if the claim isn't related to your mental health.
- You could be charged a lump sum by your insurance company. This would be to make up for what the insurance company might have charged if they'd known about your mental health.
- You'll find it harder to get insurance in the future.

You can find out more about your rights when applying for insurance with a mental health condition here:

www.mentalhealthandmoneyadvice.org/en/managing-money/insurance-and-mental-health-guide/insurance-and-mental-health-rights

Your family and friends

You might find it useful to speak to your friends and family about how your illness affects your ability to drive safely. You can ask them for their help. And you can ask them to look after your vehicle, or vehicle keys, when you're poorly. This can help you to avoid driving when you're unwell.

[Top](#)

2. Will my medication affect my ability to drive?

What about legal or prescription medication?

Some prescription drugs are classed as 'controlled drugs'. If you drive and have above a certain limit of these drugs in your blood, you can be found guilty of an offence. You can be found guilty even if the drugs were not affecting your driving.⁹

You might have been prescribed, or are using, drugs in the list below. You should speak to your doctor about how they'll affect your driving.¹⁰

- Some benzodiazepines - Diazepam, Lorazepam, Temazepam, Clonazepam, Oxazepam and Flunitrazepam
- Some painkillers - Morphine, Diamorphine, Tramadol and Ketamine
- Methadone
- Amphetamine

You can drive after taking these drugs if: ^{11,12}

- you've been prescribed them, and you've followed advice on how to take them by a healthcare professional,
- you've followed advice about how long you should leave between taking these drugs and driving, and

- they aren't causing you to be unfit to drive even if you're above the specified limits.

What about illegal drugs?¹³

It's illegal to drive if either:

- you're unfit to do so because you're on legal or illegal drugs, or
- you have certain levels of illegal drugs in your blood. Even if they haven't affected your driving.

The police can stop you and make you do a 'field impairment assessment' if they think you're on any drugs. This is a series of tests, for example asking you to walk in a straight line. They can also use a roadside drug kit to screen for cannabis and cocaine.

If they think you're unfit to drive because of drugs, you'll be arrested. You will have to take a blood or urine test at a police station.

You could be charged with a crime if the test shows you've taken drugs.

Are there other medications that might affect my driving?

It is illegal to drive when unfit to do so because of alcohol or drugs.¹⁴ This includes prescription medication. If you drive when your medication makes you unsafe to do so, the police could charge you with a driving offence.

Some medications can affect your alertness and concentration. This can affect how you drive. You may notice this more at the start of treatment or after increasing the dose. If your medication has a big effect on you, it is important to stop driving during this time.

Different medications may affect your driving in different ways. You should always talk to your doctor, or pharmacist, about how your medication might affect your driving.

You can find more information about:

- Antipsychotics
- Antidepressants
- Mood stabilisers
- Benzodiazepines
- Drugs, alcohol and mental health

at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquires team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

[Top](#)

3. How do I tell the DVLA?

[Section 1](#) of this factsheet says there are times you must tell the DVLA if you live with a mental illness.

If you already have a licence, you need to complete a medical questionnaire. You can download the form from www.gov.uk/health-conditions-and-driving by searching for your condition. Or you can ask the DVLA to send the form to you. Their details are in the [Useful contacts](#) section of this factsheet.

You need to fill out a form to give your agreement for the DVLA to contact your doctor or a specialist.

You need to send the form to the DVLA. The address is on the form.

The DVLA will try to decide if you're well enough to drive based on the information you send them. They may contact your doctor if you have agreed to this. They may ask you to have a medical assessment or to do a driving assessment.¹⁵

If you:

- don't already have a licence and you're applying, or
- are applying for a renewal of your licence if you're 70 or over

you'll be asked this information in your application form. You don't need to contact the DVLA separately.¹⁶

[Top](#)

4. When would I give up my driving licence?

If your doctor has told you that you're not fit to drive, you can give up your licence. This is called 'surrendering' your licence. If you do this, the DVLA doesn't need to assess your fitness to drive.

You can download the 'Declaration of Voluntary Surrender' from www.gov.uk/giving-up-your-driving-licence. Or you can ask the DVLA to send you a copy of this form. The contact details are in the [Useful Contacts](#) section of this factsheet.

You must give up your licence if any of the following are true.

- Your doctor tells you to stop driving for 3 months or more.
- Your medical condition affects your ability to drive safely and lasts for 3 months or more.
- You don't meet the required standards for driving because of your medical condition.

[Top](#)

5. How can I reapply for my driving licence?

How can I reapply for my licence if I surrendered it?

If you surrender your licence, you can reapply for it when your doctor thinks your condition has improved enough for you to drive again. In this case, you can drive again while your licence is being renewed, if:¹⁷

- your licence is still valid,
- you only drive under the conditions of the previous licence,
- your application is less than a year old,
- your last licence wasn't taken away or refused for medical reasons,
- you're not currently disqualified from driving, and
- you weren't disqualified as a high-risk offender on or after 1 June 2013.

The DVLA will then decide if you should continue to drive.

How can I reapply for my licence if it was revoked?¹⁸

If your licence was revoked for drink or drug driving, you can reapply for your licence before your disqualification period ends.

DVLA will send you a D27 renewal form:

- 56 days before your disqualification ends, or
- 90 days before your disqualification ends if you're a high-risk offender.

Fill in the form and send it to DVLA with the fee. You'll be told if you need to send a new passport-style photo in the D27 renewal form.

If you do not get your renewal form in the post, you can get one from the Post Office.

To renew your licence for:

- a car or motorcycle use form D1, or
- a lorry or bus use form D2

You cannot drive until your disqualification period is over.

[Top](#)

6. What happens after I tell the DVLA?

[Section 1](#) of this factsheet says you must tell the DVLA if you live with a mental illness and:

- you already have a driving licence,
- you're applying for a new driving licence, or
- you're renewing an existing one.

What if I already have a driving licence?

If you give the DVLA full information, they should decide in 6 weeks whether you can continue to drive. They'll write to you if it'll take longer.¹⁹

You can keep driving while the DVLA are considering your application as long as you're safe to drive. If you have any concerns, then you should contact your doctor or the DVLA for further advice.²⁰ If you have any doubts about driving you shouldn't drive.

The DVLA can either:²¹

- let you keep your licence or give you a new one,
- give you a licence that is valid for 1, 2, 3 or 5 years,
- tell you that you need to adapt your car by fitting special controls, or
- take away your licence.

When the DVLA takes away your licence this is known as 'revoking' it. The DVLA will revoke your licence if they think that you're not fit to drive. This doesn't mean that you'll never be able to drive again. They'll explain their decision and give you advice on when you can reapply.²²

What if I've applied for a new driving licence?

If you've applied for a new driving licence you'll need to wait to hear from the DVLA about whether you can drive. You can find the legal requirements you need to meet to be able to drive on a provisional licence here:

www.gov.uk/legal-obligations-drivers-riders?step-by-step-nav=e01e924b-9c7c-4c71-8241-66a575c2f61f.

What if I've applied for a renewed driving licence because I'm 70 or over?²³

You can drive while your licence is being renewed if you meet all the following conditions.

- you have the support of your doctor to continue driving,
- you had a valid licence,
- you only drive under the conditions of the previous licence,
- your application is less than a year old,
- your last licence wasn't revoked or refused for medical reasons,
- you're not currently disqualified, and
- you weren't disqualified as a high-risk offender on or after 1 June 2013.

How does the DVLA decide if I'm unfit to drive?

The medical standards the DVLA uses will be different depending on what type of vehicle you want to drive. The medical standards the DVLA uses are higher for larger vehicles.²⁴ The DVLA will decide based on how your symptoms affect your driving.²⁵

You can speak to your doctor about how the DVLA will assess you. Or you can look at the DVLA guidance for medical professionals. This guidance is reviewed every 6 months. Chapter 4 shows how specific mental health conditions will be assessed:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/assessing-fitness-to-drive-a-guide-for-medical-professionals#history

[Top](#)

7. What happens if I don't tell the DVLA?

[Section 1](#) of this factsheet says there are times you must tell the DVLA if you live with a mental illness.

If you must tell the DVLA about the mental illness you live, it's important you do this.

If you don't tell the DVLA about a mental illness or other medical condition that affects your driving, you could be fined up to £1,000. You may be prosecuted if you're involved in an accident as a result.²⁶

[Top](#)

8. How can I challenge a decision?

What can I do if I disagree with my doctor?

When you send details to the DVLA about your illness you can usually carry-on driving. But you can only do this if you're safe to drive. It is your responsibility to make sure that you're fit to drive.²⁷

Your doctor may say that you can't drive at this time. You shouldn't drive if your doctor has told you not to. Even if you disagree with them.²⁸

If your doctor knows you're still driving when they've told you not to, they should make every reasonable effort to persuade you to stop. If you don't stop, they can tell the DVLA.²⁹

If you don't agree with your doctor, you can ask for a second opinion about your fitness to drive. Try to get a second opinion as soon as you can. You should try to get a second opinion before the DVLA makes a decision based on your doctor's opinion.

You can find more information about '**Second opinions**' at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

If you're an older driver you can also have your driving assessed in a confidential and objective test. Organisations like the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) and I Am Road Smart offer these tests.³⁰ They may charge a fee for doing an assessment. You can find their details in the [Useful Contacts](#) section of this factsheet.

What can I do if I disagree with the DVLA?

If the DVLA says you're not fit to drive and you don't agree, you can try to challenge this. You must be able to provide relevant information that was not included in the original assessment.³¹ This might be evidence from another doctor. Or from an organisation that has assessed your driving.

It is best to try to resolve the issue without going to court by providing evidence to the DVLA to persuade them to change their mind. But you can appeal to your local magistrates' court within 6 months of the DVLA's decision.³² This can be expensive and time consuming, and you may or may not be successful.

If you want to go to court, the first step is to contact your local magistrates' court for information on how to do it. You can find your nearest court by searching here: www.gov.uk/find-court-tribunal. You need to tell the DVLA that you're appealing. You may want to get independent legal advice.

You can find more information about '**Legal advice – How to get help from a solicitor**' at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

[Top](#)

9. I live with a mental illness. Can I get a Blue Badge?

From 30 August 2019 there is legislation in place that says who is eligible for a Blue Badge. These rules include people with a mental illness.

The Blue Badge scheme helps you park closer to your destination if you're disabled.³³

Who can automatically get a Blue Badge?

People on certain benefits are automatically able to get a blue badge. You have to be getting certain elements of some benefits to be eligible.

If you live in England, you can get a Blue Badge automatically if ³⁴

- you get the higher rate of the mobility component of the Disability Living Allowance (DLA),
- you get Personal Independence Payment (PIP) because you can't walk more than 50 metres. This means that you must score 8 points or more under the 'moving around' activity of the mobility component, or
- you get the mobility component of PIP and you got 10 points for the 'planning and following journeys' activity. And you got these points because you're unable to make any journey because it would cause you overwhelming psychological distress.

If you score anything other than 10 points, you may still be eligible, but you don't automatically qualify.³⁵

Can I still apply for a Blue Badge if I am not automatically eligible?

You'll have to apply through your local authority. They'll assess your eligibility. You can apply for a Blue Badge if one of the following applies:³⁶

- you can't walk without help from someone or using mobility aids,
- you find walking very difficult due to pain, breathlessness or the time it takes,
- walking is dangerous to your health and safety,
- you're constantly a significant risk to yourself or others near vehicles, in traffic or car parks,
- you struggle a lot to plan or follow a journey,
- you find it difficult or impossible to control your actions and lack awareness of the impact on others,
- you regularly have intense and overwhelming responses to situations, causing temporary loss of behavioural control,
- you frequently become extremely anxious or fearful of public/open spaces, or
- you got points for the mobility component of PIP. But scored anything other than 10 points.

You'll need to give as much evidence as possible to support your application. Find the link below for what you can use:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/blue-badge-can-i-get-one/can-i-get-a-blue-badge.

If I don't agree with the decision, can I appeal?

If you don't agree with the decision, you can appeal.

If you've been refused a Blue Badge, your local authority should send you a decision letter. You can ask for the decision to be reviewed by replying to this letter.³⁷

If you already have a valid Blue Badge, you can still use it while you wait for the review.

If you've had your badge physically taken away, you can ask for it back. For example, if it was taken away because you've moved from Disability Living Allowance (DLA) to Personal Independence Payment (PIP).

You can contact your local Citizens Advice for help to write your response. Their details can be found in the [Useful Contacts](#) section of this factsheet.

You will find more information about how to appeal the decision or make a complaint on the Citizens Advice website here:

www.citizensadvice.org.uk/benefits/sick-or-disabled-people-and-carers/help-for-disabled-travellers1/blue-badge-scheme/if-youve-been-refused-a-blue-badge/.

[Top](#)

10. Do I have to pay car tax if I get a disability benefit?

You may be able to get free car tax, or a reduction, if you get certain benefits.

You can apply for free car tax if you get any of the following:³⁸

- higher rate mobility component of Disability Living Allowance (DLA), or
- enhanced rate mobility component of Personal Independence Payment (PIP).

You can apply for a 50% reduction in car tax if you get:³⁹

- standard rate mobility component of Personal Independence Payment (PIP).

You can only apply for free or reduced car tax if the vehicle is registered in your name. Or the name of your nominated driver.

If you're applying for free car tax, the vehicle should only be used for your personal needs. It can't be used by a nominated driver for their own personal needs.⁴⁰

You still must apply for car tax even if you don't have to pay for your car tax.⁴¹ The first time you apply for car tax exemption you need to do this at the post office.⁴²

[Top](#)

11. What if I'm not happy with how my doctor or the DVLA have treated me?

If you disagree with the decision of your doctor or the DVLA then you can challenge it. You can find more information on how to do this in [section 7](#) of this factsheet.

You may not be happy with the service you received from your doctor or the DVLA. Below are some ways you can try and resolve these issues.

I'm not happy with how my doctor has treated me. What can I do?

PALS

If you're unhappy with the service you received from your doctor, you could contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS).

PALS can try to help you sort out your problem or explain the complaints procedure. You can search for your local service by following this website link: [www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Patient-advice-and-liaison-services-\(PALS\)/LocationSearch/363](http://www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Patient-advice-and-liaison-services-(PALS)/LocationSearch/363)

Advocacy

You can use a community advocate to help talk to your doctor. Community advocates can help you to express your concerns, get information or explore your options.

They may be able to help with writing letters or attending appointments or meetings. Advocates are not part of the NHS.

Community advocacy is not required by law to be available in all areas of England.

Complain

You could make a formal complaint if you're unhappy with service you received from your doctor. There will be details on your local NHS trust website about how to make a complaint. You can get help with this from PALS or your local NHS Complaints advocacy service.

You can find more information about:

- Advocacy
- Complaints

at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

I'm not happy with how the DVLA has treated me. What can I do?

You must first contact the department that you've been dealing with. This is the quickest way to resolve your issue.

If you aren't happy with the response, you can make a formal complaint.⁴³ The details of where to complain to is in the [Useful contacts](#) section of this factsheet.

[Top](#)



Useful
Contacts

The Driver & Vehicle Licensing Agency – Medical enquiries

They give information about applying for a licence. And provide guidelines that apply to people with medical conditions wishing to drive.

Telephone: 0300 790 6806

Email via online form: www.gov.uk/contact-the-dvla/y/driving-and-medical-issues

Address: Drivers Medical Enquiries, DVLA, Swansea, SA99 1TU

Webchat: <https://contact.dvla.gov.uk/drivers-medical>

Website: www.dft.gov.uk/dvla

The Driver & Vehicle Licensing Agency – Complaints

This is the team to contact to make a formal complaint about the DVLA.

Make a complaint online: <https://contact.dvla.gov.uk/complaints>

Address: Complaints Team, DVLA, Swansea, SA6 7JL

Website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/driver-and-vehicle-licensing-agency/about/complaints-procedure

Citizens Advice

They give free, confidential and independent advice on many different issues and areas of law. You can find your local office on their website.

Telephone: 0800 144 8848

Website: www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA)

A registered charity that promotes safety and the prevention of accidents. They can provide an honest, objective assessment of your driving.

Telephone: 0121 248 2099

Email: furtherinfo@rospa.com

Website: www.rospa.com/road-safety/rospa-advanced-drivers-and-riders

I Am Road Smart

A charity that improves driver skills through coaching and education.

Telephone: 0300 303 1134

Email: support@iam.org.uk

Website: www.iamroadsmart.com

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⁷ General Medical Council. *Confidentiality: Reporting concerns about patients to the DVLA or DVA.* www.gmc-uk.org/ethical-guidance/ethical-guidance-for-doctors/confidentiality---patients-fitness-to-drive-and-reporting-concerns-to-the-dvla-or-dva/patients-fitness-to-drive-and-reporting-concerns-to-the-dvla-or-dva, paras 9-10 (Accessed 15 July 2021)

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Last updated: September 2021

Next update: September 2024

Version: 10

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Rethink Mental Illness Advice Service

Phone 0808 801 0525
Monday to Friday, 9:30am to 4pm
(excluding bank holidays)

Email advice@rethink.org

Did this help?

We'd love to know if this Information helped you

Drop us a line at: feedback@rethink.org

or write to us at Rethink Mental Illness:

RAIS
PO Box 18252
Solihull
B91 9BA

or call us on 0808 801 0525

We're open 9:30am to 4pm

Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays)



Equality, rights, fair treatment, and the maximum quality of life for all those severely affected by mental illness.

For further information on Rethink Mental Illness Phone 0121 522 7007
Email info@rethink.org



rethink.org



Patient Information Forum

Need more help?

Go to rethink.org for information on symptoms, treatments, money and benefits and your rights.

Don't have access to the web?

Call us on 0121 522 7007. We are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, and we will send you the information you need in the post.

Need to talk to an adviser?

If you need practical advice, call us on: 0808 801 0525 between 9:30am to 4pm, Monday to Friday. Our specialist advisers can help you with queries like how to apply for benefits, get access to care or make a complaint.

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