
Executive summary

Health Council of the Netherlands. Fitness to drive requirements: some recommendations. The Hague: Health Council of the Netherlands, 2014; publication no. 2014/28.

The Health Council of the Netherlands regularly advises on updates to the rules regarding medical fitness to drive a motor vehicle in traffic, listed in the annex to the Fitness Criteria Regulations 2000 (REG2000) issued by the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment (I&M). Examinations of the existing rules can be prompted by scientific developments or by cues from members of the public or professional associations.

In this advisory report, the Permanent Committee Fitness to drive Committee addresses a range of related topics.

Providing medical information

The Committee notes that there is scope for further simplifying the administrative procedure followed by those applying for a new driving license or for an extension to an existing driving license. The current rules dictate that medical examinations must be carried out by a medical examiner or by a specialist. This is because attending physicians may not issue medical certificates for their own patients. However, they are allowed to pass on factual details, provided that the patients in question consent to this. With some disorders, it is already common practice for the attending physician to fill in factual details on a form. The medical adviser at the Central Office for Motor Vehicle Driver Testing then makes a decision, based on the details contained in this form. The Committee recommends that this method be further expanded, and that the rules be amended accordingly. For drivers in need of

a new licence, this approach would deliver savings in terms of both the time and expense involved.

Use of questionnaires in the self-declaration

When applying for their first driving licence, professional drivers are required to fill in a questionnaire. They must also do so in connection with the medical examination for senior drivers and the five-yearly medical examination for an HGV or bus licence. It has been found that, in everyday practice, this requirement can occasionally give rise to confusion. For instance, if an individual had an elevated blood pressure reading at some point in the past, should they report this? All professional drivers and individuals over the age of 75 must undergo an examination and must obtain a medical certificate, which means that they have to visit a physician. At that point, any issues relating to the interpretation of the rules can be discussed straight away. This does not apply to new drivers. Accordingly, the Committee recommends that the language used in the questionnaire be better attuned to this target group and that digital explanatory notes be introduced. The Committee further recommends that different questionnaires be used for different target groups, and that the usefulness of this measure be evaluated.

TIA and stroke patients' fitness to drive

The current rules state that if the medical examination for senior drivers reveals that an individual has, in the past, suffered a TIA or a stroke, then they must see the neurologist for a specialist assessment. However, if the TIA or stroke in question occurred in the distant past, then – according to the Dutch Society of Neurology – this assessment makes little or no sense. The Committee concurs, and recommends that the rules be amended accordingly. This is also in line with European rules. However, any current restrictions that were imposed shortly after the stroke or TIA occurred must continue to apply.

Epilepsy patients' fitness to drive

In the case of epilepsy, too, if – in the course of any examination – it emerges that an individual has experienced an epileptic seizure at some time in the past, then a neurological report from the specialist is required. However, if a lengthy time has passed since the last epileptic seizure, it makes little or no sense to prepare a report. The Committee recommends that the rules be amended such that

individuals who have been free of epileptic seizures for five or more years are deemed fit for Group 1 driving licences, without restriction. This amendment is in line with European rules.

Biopic telescope users' fitness to drive

Around 80 drivers use a biopic telescope when driving. This is a vision-enhancement device for individuals who have specific problems with their visual acuity. These individuals are subject to various limitations, for instance they are only allowed to drive during the day. The Committee has considered one such driver's request to be allowed to drive during the evening and at night. However, the Fitness Criteria Regulations 2000 do not include a hardship clause. The Committee notes that insufficient scientific information is available for the rules for drivers who use a biopic telescope to be relaxed, to allow such individuals to drive in the dark. Accordingly, it recommends that a study be carried out among this group of drivers. In addition to an evaluation of their driving performance during the day, some of them could be tested to determine their ability to drive in the dark.

Modafinil (a medicinal product) users' fitness to drive

On the basis of the Fitness Criteria Regulations 2000, those who use psychostimulants are deemed unfit to drive a motor vehicle. This general rule is subject to a few specific exceptions. The Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment asked the Committee to respond to a question from a driver who takes modafinil for a disease that is not mentioned in the rules, but who still wants to be declared fit to drive. The Committee has considered whether or not it might be possible for the rules to be relaxed. It notes that there is insufficient scientific data to support such a step. It recommended that further research be carried out into the use of psychostimulants while driving.

