

# Memory Impairment and Driving

Dementia is an organic brain disorder characterized by impaired memory and judgment. Many mental skills such as judgment and perception are necessary to drive safely and may be diminished due to dementia. Dementia is a broad category that includes disorders such as Alzheimer's disease, Multi-Infarct Dementia, AIDS Dementia Complex, Posttraumatic Dementia, dementia from medication, intoxication, infections, depression, and brain tumors.

People with moderate or severe dementia will not be able to safely operate a motor vehicle because their driving skills and physical and mental abilities have deteriorated in the following ways:

- **Consciousness:** Inability to respond rationally to the environment. For example, what is seen is not comprehended. This can lead to serious accidents.
- **Cognitive Processing:** Unable to remember destination. Inattentive to external stimuli such as pedestrians or oncoming traffic. Judgment is slow or poor in traffic situations.
- **Strength and Coordination:** Muscle control is weak and reflexes are too slow to react appropriately to traffic situations or hazards.

## Reporting A Relative Or Friend

If you know of someone that may have dementia and is exhibiting unsafe driving skills, you may report that individual to your local DMV. The person will be scheduled for a reexamination of his or her driving knowledge and skills.

## Making A Decision To Report A Person With Dementia

It is not an easy decision to report a relative or friend to DMV. But if you have concerns that the person's driving skills have declined, your report may help save that person's life or the lives of others.

## How Do I Report?

You may write a letter to your local DMV identifying the driver in question and your reason for reporting the person. You may prefer to obtain a copy of a DMV form entitled *Report of Driver with Dementia*. This form gives the reporter guidance in providing information about the person that will be most useful to the department. Whichever method of reporting you choose, it is important that you *sign your name*.

## Confidentiality

You may request that your name not be revealed to the person you are reporting and DMV will keep your name confidential. We understand that reporting a relative or close friend is a sensitive issue. We do not want to jeopardize your relationship with that person, but we do want to ensure that an unsafe driver is removed from the road. Vehicle Code [[section]]1808.5 ensures that all records received by DMV relating to the physical or mental condition of any person are confidential and not open to public inspection.

## **What Does DMV Do When It Receives A Report On A Driver With Dementia?**

DMV will send the reported person a notice that he or she has been scheduled for a reexamination. We will also send that person a *Driver Medical Evaluation* form that must be completed by the person's treating physician. If the person does not appear for the scheduled appointment or have the medical form completed, his or her driving privilege will be suspended.

## **What Happens At The Reexamination?**

The person will be given a written test on the rules of the road and will be interviewed by a Driver Safety hearing officer. The hearing officer will review the person's medical form and ask the person many questions. Some of the questions will focus on the person's memory. If the person does well on the written test and at the interview, he or she will be scheduled for a driving test. If the person does not do well on the written test or at the interview, and it is evident that the mental skills for safe driving are impaired, the driving privilege will be suspended. It is suggested that the person be accompanied by another driver in case a suspension is imposed immediately.

## **Driving Test**

A person with mild dementia is given a special driving test that takes 30 to 45 minutes. The examiner will be looking for the person's ability to concentrate, recall multiple instructions, execute them safely, and possibly find a location that should be familiar to the person (church, doctor, pharmacy, home, store, etc.). The examiner will be watching for signs of mental confusion, perceptual misjudgment, and/or impulsive actions or reactions to normal driving situations.

If the person does well on the driving test, he or she will be permitted to continue driving. However, DMV will continue to reexamine this person on a regular basis. Dementia is generally a progressive disorder, therefore, the driver will be rescheduled for a reexamination every 6 to 12 months. This allows DMV to monitor any deterioration of the person's condition.

## **DMV's Mission**

A major goal and responsibility of DMV is to enhance highway safety by increasing the competency of drivers. While the driving competency of persons affected by dementia may be compromised, DMV recognizes that the independence and mobility provided by the ability to drive is an important factor in the quality of life for most Californians. All factors are considered, including medical information and the person's ability or inability to demonstrate compensation for the condition. A decision will be made, regarding the driving privilege, only after a fair and comprehensive evaluation of all information and evidence is made.