



Kansas Department on Aging

Older Drivers Fact Sheet

Giving up driving is very difficult for most people. Driving gives a person freedom and control, a sense of self-esteem and independence. Often concerns arise about elderly parents, neighbors or friends and their ability to drive safely. Fortunately, most elderly drivers assess their own skills and begin changing their driving habits – not driving after dark, or at busy times of the day. Overall, elderly drivers are responsible and experienced. However, a few high profile accidents have brought this issue to national attention. Below are some suggestions and options for older drivers and their families.

Simple Tips to Safer Driving:

- Have regular check-ups including eye and hearing exams
- Take part in an exercise program so that you maintain your health and can react quickly
- Ask your doctor if any of your medications can affect your driving
- Reduce noise in your car; turn off the radio
- Ask passengers to not disturb you in high traffic or confusing situations
- Plan rest stops in any long distance driving and allow plenty of time
- Do not use a cell phone while driving
- Do not travel with your pets unless they are in a cage
- Avoid high traffic times and areas; drive only during the daylight hours
- Do not drive in bad weather; wear your seat belt properly
- Make sure your car seat and mirrors are adjusted for your height
- Keep your car well-maintained and equipped with emergency equipment such as a flashlight and blanket
- Take a refresher driving course to improve your skills and possibly get a discount on your insurance

What Should I Say?

If you have a loved one that you are concerned about, the first thing to do is to approach them directly. Do not expect this to be an easy task or that they will want to hear what you say. Be prepared with specific incidents and suggestions. You are threatening their independence and their dignity. Your approach can make all the difference in how well they hear you and their willingness to change their driving habits. “Dad, you’re too old to drive anymore” won’t go near as far as “Dad, I’m concerned about your driving and the fender-bender you had yesterday. Can we discuss some ways to help you drive a little longer and still be safe on the road?”

Some signs that may indicate a need for the above discussion include: forgetting how to get to familiar places, failure to follow traffic signs, poor judgment of distance, making turns that are too wide or too tight, making poor decisions in traffic such as failing to yield or too slow to react to emergencies, nervousness or fatigue after driving. Another sign is a series of fender-bender accidents.

Help your loved one find alternative solutions to driving. Check out the bus route close to their home, whether their doctor's office or hospital has transportation options, if there is a senior center that can take them to the store. Offer to take them to the big wedding on Saturday or the funeral on Monday. Would the grandchild like more practice driving by taking grandma to get her hair done? Give gift certificates or cash for birthdays that can be used for transportation other than driving. Contact local agencies to see what is available in the areas they usually drive. Your assistance and guidance in making this transition needs to be ongoing.

What Action Can be Taken?

A family member, caregiver or friend concerned about the wisdom of a loved one continuing to drive may seek the assistance of the state by sending a signed letter of concern to: Director, Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV), Docking State Office Building, 901 SW Harrison Avenue, Topeka, KS 66612-0001, Telephone: 785-296-3601.

Physicians, attorneys, case managers, social workers, legislators and law enforcement officers may also initiate the contact.

The letter should include the name of the person, the license registration number, and some examples of the person's unsafe driving because of medical reasons (can include Alzheimer's Disease or another form of dementia) and why you feel it is unsafe for the person to continue operating a vehicle. You should request that the person's driver's license be revoked.

The DMV, upon receiving your letter, will send the person a letter containing medical forms that need to be filled out by the person's doctor. If these forms are not returned within 30 days, the driver's license will be revoked for failure to submit an acceptable medical report.

If the forms are filled out and returned to the DMV within 30 days, they will be reviewed and the doctor's recommendations will be taken into account in deciding what the next steps will be. Generally, there are three options: (1) revoke the license if the doctor states the individual should not be driving, (2) authorize a full test if the doctor states the person is physically and mentally capable of driving, and (3) submit the medical information to the Medical Advisory Board for their opinion.

If the person cannot pass the testing, the license will be revoked. If the person passes the testing (and this may well happen in some cases of dementia), the driver's license will be restricted as recommended by the doctor and the examiner. An annual medical reporting requirement may be added to the license for follow-up.

Who Can I Call for More Information?

Call your local Area Agency on Aging to find out about transportation options available in your area. Call your local bus and taxi companies to see what options are available and the cost. Find out about refresher driving courses in your area and encourage attendance. There may also be flyers or other printed material that can help guide you through this difficult time.

The Kansas Department on Aging (KDOA) does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age or disability. If you believe you have been discriminated against by either KDOA or a KDOA funded program, please contact KDOA to receive additional information on filing a complaint: 1-800-432-3535 (voice); 1-800-766-3777(TTY).