

Driving After a Stroke in PEI

Information for me and my family

Driving gives independence that is important to many people. A stroke can cause changes that make it unsafe to drive. People recover from a stroke at different rates. About half of those who have had a stroke will return to driving¹.

Key points

I am not to drive for at minimum of one month after my stroke and I need to wait until my doctor/nurse practitioner says I am safe.

I need to discuss driving with my doctor/nurse practitioner **before** I start driving again to make sure that it is safe.

After one month I **may** be able to drive again, as long as my doctor/nurse practitioner agrees it is safe for me to do so.

When can I drive after having a stroke?

In PEI, my doctor/nurse practitioner **must** report to the Highway Safety Division that I have had a stroke. This is because it might be dangerous for me to drive a vehicle (such as a car, truck, tractor, etc.). This will cancel my license.

The rules in PEI are:

- My doctor/nurse practitioner must assess my readiness to drive.
- The timing for reassessment is specified by my doctor/nurse practitioner.
- Other health issues such as seizures may affect my return to driving.

If the doctor/nurse practitioner is unsure whether I am ready to drive, he or she may send me for an assessment with an approved certified specialist.

It is illegal to drive with a cancelled license

1. Devos, H; Akinwuntan, A E; Nieuwboer, A; Truijen, S; Tant, M; De Weerd, W (2011). Screening for fitness to drive after stroke: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Neurology*, 76(8)

What is everyone's responsibility?

Stroke Survivor (Me):

- Ask my doctor/NP or OT if my stroke has been reported to Highway Safety Division.
- Not drive until I have been told by my doctor/NP that it is safe to do so, **even if** my license has not been cancelled.
- Ask my doctor/NP and health care team any questions I have about driving.
- Ask my doctor/NP if I need to have my vision checked.
- Contact Highway Safety Division if I am unsure of the status of my license (see phone number later in document).

Doctor/Nurse Practitioner (NP):

- Assess my readiness to return to driving based on tests and reports from the healthcare team.
- Send required reports to Highway Safety Division.

Occupational Therapist (OT):

- Complete pre-driving screening tests to assess whether the stroke has affected parts of the brain that are used for driving (if needed).
- Share assessment results with me and my doctor/NP.
- Send information to Highway Safety Division (if needed).

Highway Safety Division:

- Review doctor/NP/OT report and act on recommendation to conduct driving test or cancel my driver's license.
- Notify me of the decision about my driver's license.
- Let me know what to do next.

Family Members/Caregivers:

- Provide support and guidance to me, including reminders, when I cannot drive because of potential risk to myself and others.
- Discuss concerns with my doctor/NP if it is felt that I am not safe to drive.

When should I be tested for driving?

This will be decided on an individual basis. I will need to discuss this with my doctor/nurse practitioner (NP), occupational therapist, or both. The timing is different for everyone. This is because stroke affects everyone differently.

It may be suggested that I wait before any testing is done to allow for more stroke recovery and a chance at better test results.

What is the process for getting my license back?

When my licence has not been cancelled:

My doctor/nurse practitioner (NP) must agree that I am safe to resume driving before I return to driving any vehicle. I may be told to wait longer than a month before returning to driving. I may also be asked to complete a formal driving assessment. My doctor/NP may be required to send a form into the Division of Highway Safety.

When my licence has been cancelled:

Highway Safety Division or your doctor may require your driving skills to be tested. This is called an evaluation and may include:

1. A written test.
2. A vision test.
3. An on road driving test

The letter you get from Highway Safety Division will explain to you what to do next.

Note: Commercial class driver licenses 1, 2, 3 and 4 are held to a higher standard with regards to determining fitness to drive, demonstration of necessary skills to drive and vision standards.

What happens during a driving assessment?

There are two parts to a **formal** driving assessment:

Part One: Pre-road tests

- Typically, the occupational therapist will do these tests with me at the Provincial Ambulatory Stroke Rehabilitation Clinic or it's District Teams. As well they can be conducted by a private certified driving rehabilitation specialist.
- The tests will look at my vision, judgment, thinking, and physical skills (strength, sensation, reaction time, and arm, leg & neck movement).
- These tests will show whether I am ready for the on-road test, if I need more practice, or if I should think about different options.

Part two: On-road tests

There are two types of on-road tests in PEI. Both tests will look at my driving skills, such as safety, following directions, and my physical ability to drive a vehicle.

- One is done in a car with the Highway Safety Division by the Driver Improvement Officer who has training in doing driving tests for people with health issues.
- The other type of test will be done in a car with a Certified Driving Instructor and the occupational therapist (OT Driving Rehabilitation Specialist).
- with the Highway Safety Division. The test with the OT Driving Rehabilitation Specialist costs about **\$500 to \$800**. This is why it is important to wait until I am ready.

A referral for the driving assessment must come from a doctor/nurse practitioner, or it may be required by Highway Safety Division as explained in your letter.

What are the possible results from the driving assessment?

1. I can return to driving with or without limits (e.g. no driving at night, only near home).
2. With changes made to my car, I may be able to return to driving.
3. It is too soon to return to driving. I need driver's rehabilitation. After practicing or learning new ways to drive, I may return for another assessment to see if I am ready to return to driving.
4. I am not able to return to driving.

What if I am no longer able to drive?

This may be a very hard time for me and my family. It is normal to feel upset, angry or have a sense of loss. It may be hard to accept this decision, but there are other options for me in the community.

Ask my occupational therapist, or other health care provider, about resources in my community that can help me get to places that I need to go (e.g. family and friends, Pat & the Elephant, taxi, etc.)

How can I find out about the status of my license and file?

Call the Records Section of the **Highway Safety Division at 902-368-5210 or 902-432-2714.**

I can also read more about the medical review process online at:

<https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/information/transportation-infrastructure-and-energy/medical-fitness-drive>

If I do not agree with the final decision of the Highway Safety Division, I can appeal the decision. More information about how to appeal will be included in their letter.

Appendix A:

Changes from My Stroke that Can Impact Driving

The following are areas that may impact my driving safety:

Movement Problems

- Weakness and fatigue
- Poor coordination, uncontrollable or limited movement in my arms, legs, and neck
- Limited sensation, such as difficulty feeling the steering wheel with my hands or feeling the gas / brake pedal with my feet

Visual Problems

- Changes in ability to see clearly or in focus
- Changes in field of vision, or what I am able to see without moving my head

Hearing Loss

- Changes in hearing may affect my ability to drive

Speech/Language Problems

- Ability to read signs
- Ability to ask for help or directions

Visual-perceptual and Cognitive Problems

- Visual neglect (that is, a “blind side” that your brain forgets is there)
- Changes in my ability to concentrate or pay attention
- Changes in my decision-making speed
- Longer reaction time
- Impulsive behaviour (that is, acting too quickly without thought or planning)
- My body moving in ways that I don’t expect or plan (also known as motor planning problems or apraxia)
- Changes in my judgement
- Changes in my memory

Seizures

- I need to be seizure-free for a minimum of 6 months (per section 17.6.1 of the CCMTA guide) prior to being considered to drive again.
- My doctor/nurse practitioner will determine if driving can be considered.