

EPILEPSY FACT SHEET

Driving in Alberta

Driving is a privilege that enhances personal freedom. It offers convenience and greater work and social opportunities. **Driving regulations are established to ensure everyone's safety and prevent accidents.** *Studies have shown that a person who has been seizure free for six months or more is 87% less likely to have a seizure related accident, and that drivers with epilepsy have a lower rate of non-seizure related accidents than the general population.

In Alberta, drivers are required by law to report any health condition, including epilepsy or a seizure disorder, that may affect their ability to drive. It is not mandatory for physicians to report their patients who have a health condition that may interfere with safe driving; however, the treating physician is in the best position to judge a patient's competency to drive, particularly in complex cases. Your physician will advise you not to drive but also has the discretion to report patients who are not seizure free and continue to drive.

Once you have reported your condition to Alberta Transportation your driving privileges may be suspended. **In most cases once you have been seizure free for six months and with a favorable recommendation from your physician you may apply to have your license reinstated.** A Medical Review committee looks at each case individually and makes an assessment based on your circumstances. In addition to the above, someone with epilepsy is normally eligible to hold a Class 5 (private passenger vehicle) or Class 6 (motor cycle) license if the following criteria are satisfied:

- The physician feels the individual is being truthful about the frequency of seizures;
- The physician believes the individual to be a conscientious person who will take medication in the manner prescribed and follow all the physician's instructions carefully;
- The applicant is under regular medical supervision so that the physician will at once become aware of any further seizure activity; and,
- The seizures appear to be controlled by medication, and the medication does not cause significant side effects that would impair driving.

You may be required to sign a declaration upon renewal regarding the seriousness of providing false information. Other situations involving the reinstatement of, or changes to a driver's license include:

- A person with epilepsy who has been seizure-free on medication for 1 year and whose seizures recur after medication was stopped on the physicians instructions may drive after resuming medication.
- A person with epilepsy who has been seizure free on or off medication for 5 years may be considered for any class of license.
- A person with epilepsy who has seizures only when asleep or immediately upon awakening may be considered for a Class 5 or 6 license if they have satisfactory waking EEG's and are subject to regular medical supervision. They may hold any class of license if they have been seizure free for 5 years on or off medication.
- A person with simple partial seizures involving a single limb and with no impairment of consciousness may be considered for a Class 5 or 6 license following a satisfactory neurological assessment and any Class of license after 3 years from the initial seizure with no generalized seizures nor impairment of consciousness.
- Someone experiencing a single unprovoked seizure may not be eligible for any class of license until a complete satisfactory neurological assessment has been conducted. They may then be considered for any class of licence once they have been seizure free for one year and there are no signs of epileptiform activity.

More information about the license reinstatement process can be obtained from Alberta Transportation, Driver Fitness & Monitoring –Toll Free at 310-0000 (Government Rite Line), and ask for (780) 427-8230.

Vehicle Insurance

You are required to advise your insurance company of your epilepsy. **Failure to do so may mean that your policy may become invalid in the event of an accident—regardless of the cause. Think about this carefully. Is this a risk you are willing to take? Importantly—is it a risk you can afford to take?**

Once you have your license, or have it reinstated, usually with a supporting letter from your treating physician, you are eligible for insurance coverage. Unless you have been involved in an accident your rates will not necessarily be higher. However, like anything else you may have to shop around. Further, as the judgment of the underwriter will play a factor, it is in your best interests to make your inquiries and application in person. To see a healthy and able person before them can dispel any misconceptions that person may have about epilepsy and the abilities of a person with epilepsy.

Safe Driving Tips

- Report all seizures to your physician and if you have a breakthrough seizure talk to your physician immediately to determine the cause. **If you are having seizures DO NOT drive.**
- Take your medications in the manner prescribed. If you miss a dose do not drive until you resume your medications
- If your drug treatment plan is being changed to another drug or different dose wait to see how it will affect you before driving.
- Avoid driving when you are tired.
- Do not drive for long periods of time without breaks. If possible consider a driving partner for long trips to reduce your time driving.
- Do not skip meals or go for long periods of time without sleep.
- Everyone should avoid alcohol before driving, this is even more important for someone with epilepsy.
- If you have photosensitive epilepsy wear polarized sunglasses.
- Know your triggers and avoid/manage them.
- Avoid driving when experiencing strong emotions, or when you are highly stressed.
- For trips of long distances consider other modes of transportation such as bus or plane. In some cases, transportation companies will allow a caregiver to travel at no cost if care is/may be required during the trip. Ask when booking what the policies for an escort are.
- Consider car pooling as a way of rotating driving schedules to reduce the amount of time spent driving.
- **If you are unable to drive**, public transportation is available. Perhaps there are situations where family, friends, and peers can help—especially if you can assist with covering the cost of fuel. *We understand that this can be a challenging, and difficult transition to make.* In some situations you may qualify for services such as the Handi-Bus. EAC staff can make referrals to available services. Additionally, EAC has some resources available to help people with limited finances attend EAC activities and important appointments, such as a doctor's appointment.

Drive Safe!

For Further Information Contact:

Your Physician

Alberta Transportation—Toll Free at 310-0000 (Government Rite Line), and ask for (780) 427-8230

The Epilepsy Association of Calgary

316, 4014 Macleod Trail S.E.
Calgary, AB T2G 2R7
Telephone: (403) 230-2764
Toll Free: 1-866-EPILEPSY
www.epilepsycalgary.com



Central Alberta Office

4811 – 48th Street
Red Deer, AB T4N 1S6
Telephone: (403) 358-3358
Toll Free: 1-866-EPILEPSY
www.epilepsycalgary.com

