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### Aging News & Information

## AMA Issues Older Driver Safety Guide to Help Slow Leading Cause of Injury Deaths in Seniors

**Per mile driven, fatality rate for drivers 85+ is nine times higher than for drivers 25 to 69**

March 17, 2010 - To help protect the lives of senior citizens and make our roads safer, the American Medical Association (AMA) has released a new *Physician's Guide to Assessing and Counseling Older Drivers*. Motor vehicle injuries are a leading cause of injury-related deaths in adults over 65. Per mile driven, the fatality rate for drivers 85 years and older is nine times higher than for drivers 25 to 69 years old.

"For many, a driver's license symbolizes independence and the decision to retire from driving can have both practical and emotional implications on a patient's life," said AMA President-elect Cecil B. Wilson, M.D.

#### Related Archive Stories

[Senior Citizen Drivers Setting New Records - For Safe Driving, Fewer Fatal Crashes](#)

Despite growing numbers, fewer older drivers died in crashes and fewer were involved in fatal collisions  
Jan. 13, 2009

[Florida Vision Test of Elderly Drivers Appears to Reduce Deaths, But No One Knows How](#)

Importance of driving to older adults suggests that isolating the true mechanism responsible for the decline is in fact important  
Nov. 10, 2008

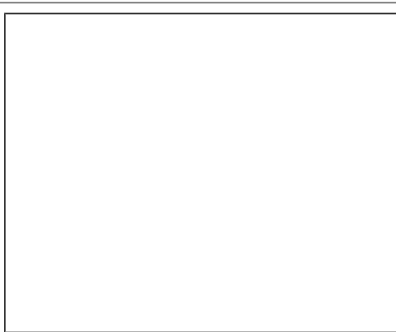
"Physicians play an important role in the safe mobility of their older patients, and we encourage them to make driver safety a routine part of office visits for their senior patients."

The AMA's guide can help physicians address the driving safety of their older patients and better understand the public health issues involved. Topics covered in the guide include screening, assessing functional abilities, handling evaluations and referrals, conditions and medications that may impact driving, addressing safer driving, and counseling those who are no longer able to drive.

A section with worksheets and resources for older patients and caregivers is also included.

Older drivers have a higher risk of traffic fatalities for two reasons: Drivers age 75 and older are involved in significantly more motor vehicle crashes per mile driven, and older drivers are considerably more fragile and more likely to suffer a fatal injury in the event of a crash than their younger counterparts.

The *Physician's Guide to Assessing and Counseling Older Drivers* was



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### [Smart Features for Mature Drivers Introduced by AAA at NY Auto Show](#)

Research finds features to improve safety, comfort of senior citizens – booming driver market: AAA starts senior driver Web page  
March 25, 2008

### [Senior Citizens Not As Dangerous Behind the Wheel as Youngest Drivers](#)

Not much more likely to cause auto accidents than baby boomers  
July 19, 2007

### [Aging Committee Leaders Release Older Driver Report Calling for States to Share Information](#)

Older drivers more likely than other age groups to suffer injuries or die in car crashes  
April 19, 2007

### [Study Explores Why Older Drivers Have So Many Wrecks at Intersections?](#)

Protected left turn arrows and roundabouts may help the oldest drivers  
March 19, 2007

### [Elderly Drivers Increasingly More Likely to Die in Auto Accidents](#)

Study looks at age, gender as major factors in severity of accident injuries  
January 5, 2007

### [Senior Citizens Driving with Dementia Are Targets of Training for Physicians](#)

Academy of Neurology says seniors with mild dementia should stop driving  
December 28, 2006

### [Senior Citizens Who Give Up Driving may take Express Lane to Nursing Home](#)

'Taking the keys has serious consequences for older drivers'  
July 19, 2006

### [Senior Citizen Drivers: Are They Menace? Should Licensing Laws Be Tougher?](#)

Safety advocates want tougher licensing for seniors and special vehicles  
June 16, 2005

### [New Guide Available Online to Those Concerned About an Aging Driver](#)

July 6, 2004

### [Safety for Older Drivers is Goal of New Website](#)

developed by the AMA in cooperation with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).

The guide in pdf format is currently available online - [Click Here](#).

To order a hard copy or CD ROM, please send your name and preference – [Click Here](#).

Physicians can order a free hard copy to be available in four-six weeks – [Click Here](#)

Later this year, a Continuing Medical Education course for physicians will be offered on the AMA's Web site.

### **Why Are Older Drivers at Risk? Here is AMA's Answer**

Older drivers have a higher risk of traffic fatalities for two reasons. First, drivers age 75 and older are involved in significantly more motor vehicle crashes per mile driven than middle-aged drivers. Second, older drivers are considerably more fragile than their younger counterparts, and are therefore more likely to suffer a fatal injury in the event of a crash.

The excess crash rate of older drivers results from impairments in the following functions that are important for driving:

**Vision** - Vision is the primary sense utilized in driving. Adequate visual acuity and field of vision are important for safe driving, but tend to decline with age as a result of physiologic changes and an increase in diseases such as cataracts, glaucoma, macular degeneration, and stroke. Glare, impaired contrast sensitivity, and an increase in time to adjust to changes in lightness and darkness are other problems commonly experienced by older drivers.

**Cognition** - Driving is a complex activity that requires a variety of high-level cognitive skills, including memory, visual processing, attention, and executive skills. Certain medical conditions (such as dementia) and medications that are common in the older population have a large impact on cognition.

**Motor function** - Motor abilities such as muscle strength, endurance, flexibility, and proprioception are necessary for operating vehicle controls and turning to view traffic. Even prior to driving, motor abilities are needed to enter the car safely and fasten the seatbelt. Changes related to age and musculoskeletal diseases (such as arthritis) can decrease an individual's ability to drive safely and comfortably.

Declines in these functions make older drivers vulnerable to crashes in complex situations that require good visual perception, attention, and rapid response. As a result, older drivers are more likely to experience crashes at intersections, especially when a left-hand turn is involved.

The AMA has adopted several policies with regard to driving by older people. Links to these are below.

### **AMA policies that address driving safety include:**

- [E-2.24 Impaired Drivers and their Physicians](#)

This policy articulates the physician's responsibility to recognize impairments in patients' driving ability.

- [H-15.992 Motor Vehicle Accidents](#)

In this policy, the AMA recognizes motor vehicle-related trauma as a major public health problem.

- [H-15.972 Licensing People to Drive](#)

This policy encourages research and development of screening methods and articulates the physician's role in advising patients on driving safety.

- [H-15.990 Automobile-Related Injuries](#)

This policy suggests several "community layers" that are important in reducing motor vehicle injuries.

- [H-15.995 Medical Advisory Boards in Driver Licensing](#)

This policy endorses the establishment of state motor vehicle department medical advisory boards.

More Videos by AMA on Older Driver Safety

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fd1q0mDZuHA>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Patm47c8DE>

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June 26, 2004

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