



## The Palliative Care team

# Legal information on driving and medications

### Why this guidance?

The Department for Transport brought in a new law on 2nd March 2015 which governs driving while taking certain drugs. The law is aimed at improving road safety.

### Who does this affect?

The new law applies to **anyone** who is driving, attempting to drive or is in charge of a vehicle and has specified drugs over a set limit in their body.

### What medications are included in the new law?

- 'Opioid' painkillers, such as morphine (also known as Oramorph, Sevredol, MST, Zomorph), methadone, oxycodone (also known as Shortec, Oxynorm, Longtec and Oxycontin), fentanyl, codeine, tramadol
- Benzodiazepines, such as diazepam, lorazepam, clonazepam, temazepam, oxazepam, flunitrazepam
- Ketamine
- Amphetamines (dexamfetamine, methylphenidate, selegiline)



## Patient Information

### **How does this law work?**

The police have new powers to test and prosecute drivers who are suspected of having taken any of the specified drugs over a set limit. The law also applies to people who are attempting to drive or are in charge of a vehicle.

Police may use a roadside test to test whether a driver's condition might be due to the presence of drugs. If the test detects any relevant drugs, or the police suspect a driver is under the influence of drugs, the driver may be arrested and taken to the police station for a blood or urine test. This will confirm the type and level of the drugs in the driver's body.

### **Medical Defence**

However, the new offence has a statutory 'medical defence' to protect patients who test positive for any of the specified medications. This is as long as they are taken in accordance with the advice of a healthcare professional or the patient information leaflet that accompanies the medicine and as long as your driving is not impaired.

For example, if you are taking morphine for pain and your driving is not impaired **and** you can provide evidence that you are taking morphine as advised by your healthcare professional, the police will not prosecute you.

### **What is our advice?**

Keep taking your medications as prescribed

Check the leaflet that comes with your medication for information on how it may affect your driving ability.

Carry evidence with you when driving that shows the medication was:

- prescribed or supplied by a healthcare professional to treat a medical problem
- taken in accordance with the leaflet accompanying the medicine (if bought over the counter)

Suitable evidence could include:

- a copy of the prescription for the medication

## Patient Information

- a copy of the specific advice given to you by a healthcare professional showing what the medication is, how much you take (the dose), and when
- the patient information leaflet that came with the medicine (if bought over the counter)

If you are unsure and have any questions, talk to the healthcare professional who prescribed your medication or a member of the pharmacy team for over-the-counter medications.

### **Do not drive if:**

You feel that your driving is impaired. For example, if you experience sleepiness, dizziness, poor coordination, visual problems, slowed or impaired thinking or confusion. You should also not drive if:

- you are struggling with pain
- if there is anything that makes you less able to make a sudden emergency stop with your vehicle

Your driving is most likely to be impaired:

- when you have just started taking a medication listed above
- when the dose of your medication has recently changed
- if you are taking other types of medication that could potentially impair your driving if taken alongside the specified medication
- if you are taking additional doses of the specified medication, for example for breakthrough pain or anxiety (such as Oramorph)
- if you take any amount of alcohol (however small) in addition to these medications
- if you have taken strong drugs that have not been recommended by your doctor, such as cannabis

It will remain an offence to drive while your ability is impaired. It is **your** responsibility to consider if your or might be impaired on any given occasion. If in doubt, don't drive.

For more information, go to [www.gov.uk/drug-driving-law](http://www.gov.uk/drug-driving-law)

### **General advice on driving whilst taking such medications**

You should not drive for at least five days when you first start taking opioid painkillers, or if you are changing the dose of opioid painkillers. Sometimes longer is needed.

### **When can I start driving?**

If you are not drowsy after you have been taking your opioid painkillers for five days, you can start driving again. Your first trip should be:

- short
- on roads that you are used to
- at a time when the traffic is not too busy

You may also find it helps to have an experienced driver with you to begin with in case you cannot finish your journey.

### **Do I need to inform the Drivers Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) if I am taking opioid painkillers or other medications listed above?**

You may not need to inform the DVLA that you are taking these medications. However, there may be other information about your illness that the DVLA should know. Your doctor or the DVLA can give you more advice about this.

### **Contact details for the DVLA are:**

Drivers' Medical Enquiries, DVLA, Swansea, SA99 1TU.

Phone: 0300 790 6806.

Online: [www.dvla.gov.uk](http://www.dvla.gov.uk)

You will need to know your driving licence number when you contact them.

### **What about my car insurance company?**

You should tell your motor insurance company about your current state of health, and what medication you are taking. Each insurance company is different, but your insurance may not be valid if you do not do this.

## Patient Information

### Contact details

UHCW Hospital Specialist Palliative Care Team: 02476 965498

### Sources of information

- Twycross R, Wilcock A and Howard P. (2014) Palliative Care Formulary. 5<sup>th</sup> Edition. Palliativedrugs.com
- Milton Keynes Hospital NHS Foundation Trust: Patient Guidance on Medication and driving. Available from: [www.palliativedrugs.com](http://www.palliativedrugs.com)  
Accessed 06/03/18

### Help us to get it right

- If you have a complaint, concern, comment, or compliment please let us know by speaking to a member of our staff. We learn from your feedback and use the information to improve and develop our services.
- If you would like to talk to someone outside the service, contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 0800 028 4203 or email your queries on [feedback@uhcw.nhs.uk](mailto:feedback@uhcw.nhs.uk)

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format, please contact the Palliative Care team on 02476 965498 for more information and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy.

To give feedback on this leaflet please email [feedback@uhcw.nhs.uk](mailto:feedback@uhcw.nhs.uk)

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