

COVID-19, vision, and fitness to drive

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Recent media reports have raised the issue of whether COVID-19 can affect eyesight to an extent that it may interfere with vision for driving. The morbidity of COVID-19 is not particularly associated with the eye, at most causing a conjunctivitis, (1) a condition that in itself rarely interferes with vision to an extent sufficient to impair fitness to drive: even with anecdotal reports of late ocular complications, there are currently no reports of sight-threatening manifestations of COVID-19. (2)

The more important issue raised is clarifying the advice that should be given to the general public and patients who have a concern about any emergent condition, including one affecting vision, which causes them to feel concerned about their medical fitness to drive. This is an issue which needs to be addressed as we have recently shown that the general public and health care professionals have a variable insight into the shared responsibility for maintaining medical fitness to drive. (3)

This responsibility is shared between the driver, health care professionals and driver licensing agencies. For drivers this means maintaining their own health, following medical advice related to relevant conditions, and seeking medical advice for any condition which they consider or suspect might impact on their ability to drive safely: this aspect has been underplayed in much of the literature of traffic medicine. The National Office for Traffic Medicine and Road Safety Authority in Ireland have sought to remedy this by developing a series of driver information leaflets on relevant conditions for the general public, and have developed a public outreach programme which it delivers at large scale public events (3).

Healthcare professionals and driver licensing agencies need to promote strategies alerting the general public, patients, and licensed drivers that any driver concerned that a medical condition, including concerns for vision after infection with COVID-19, might impact on driving ability should cease driving immediately. They should not resume driving until they have been assessed by an appropriate healthcare professional, received treatment if required, and are cleared medically for a return to driving.

References

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