

Over-70s face eye tests to keep licence

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Duke of Edinburgh, 98, gave up his licence three weeks after a collision with another car STEVE PARSONS/PA

Older drivers are facing compulsory eye tests for the first time as part of government plans to improve road safety.

The Department for Transport said it was considering mandatory tests for all motorists at the age of 70 followed by repeat assessments every three years.

It said the vision test could be used to “identify drivers who pose a collision risk”, with motorists who fail potentially being banned from the road.

The disclosure was made as figures published by the DfT yesterday showed for the first time more than two thirds of people aged over 70 had a full [driving licence](#). According to the figures, 67 per cent of people in the oldest age bracket had a driving licence in 2018, up from 64 per cent a year earlier. In the mid-90s, only 33 per cent of those aged over 70 got behind the wheel.

The DfT said age “should not be a barrier” to driving and insisted that motorists’ knowledge, experience and skills could improve over time. However, it acknowledged that cognitive and physical capability could also decline with age, affecting reaction times and increasing the chance of an accident.

At present licences expire when motorists reach 70 and must be renewed every three years. Drivers have to declare their eyesight meets legal standards and flag up other relevant medical conditions. However, there are no compulsory assessments.

Debate over the issue intensified after a crash involving the Duke of Edinburgh in January. His Land Rover overturned when it collided with another car near Sandringham. The duke, who is now 98, [gave up his licence three weeks later](#).

Separate figures from the DfT showed that two people were killed and 198 more were injured in crashes in 2017 where uncorrected or defective eyesight was a contributory factor. In the past five years 37 people were killed and almost 1,100 people injured because of their eyesight.

Last year 4,603 drivers over 70 had their licences revoked because of their eyesight.

As part of its recently published road safety plan, the DfT said it had already handed grants to charities to develop driver training for older motorists while investing in “mobility centres” that offer advice to people who give up driving.

A research programme will be launched in partnership with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency to assess the risk posed by poor eyesight to drivers. This will consider the case for a “new vision test to identify drivers who pose a collision risk”, the plan said.

“Good eyesight is important,” the document said. “We are minded to consider there may be a case for mandatory eyesight tests at 70 and at three-year intervals thereafter, to coincide with licence renewal.”

An older drivers taskforce, set up with the government’s backing, recommended in 2016 that the age for licence renewal should be put back until 75 and be accompanied by evidence of a recent eye test.

A full public consultation would be held before any change was made, the DfT said.

Caroline Abrahams, a director at Age UK, said: “Every driver, regardless of age, is responsible for ensuring they are safe on the road. Being able to see clearly is obviously absolutely crucial.

“When it comes to the suggestion of mandatory eye tests however, we are not aware of any evidence showing poor eye sight is a significant cause of accidents among older drivers.

The Department for Transport says it will review the research, but until the results are known it feels premature for drivers to have a compulsory eye test at 70 and at three yearly intervals thereafter.”

A DfT spokeswoman said: “The UK has some of the safest roads in the world but we are always looking at ways to make them safer. As part of this, we want to find out more about how eyesight testing could play a role in reducing the number of fatalities on our roads.”