**Vision Requirements for IL Drivers License Renewals & The Role of the OD**

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Periodically, the specific requirements for the renewal of a driver’s license are updated by the State of Illinois. There has been significant confusion about several influencing factors of the process, such as age, vision thresholds, early renewals, the Safe Driver Renewal Program, and the Vision Specialist Report. This article will attempt to explain the current requirements as they specifically relate to the role of the optometrist.

**Visual Acuity:** Applicants for renewal must achieve the following levels of central visual acuity:
- 20/40 or better with both eyes, without corrective lenses: No restrictions.
- 20/40 or better with both eyes, with corrective lenses: Corrective lenses restriction.
- 20/40 in one eye, but not the other: Outside mirrors required on both sides of vehicle.
- 20/41 – 20/70 with both eyes: Eligible for daylight driving only
- 20/41 – 20/70 in one eye, but not the other: Daylight only, outside mirrors.
- Less than 20/70: Ineligible for drivers license, except with telescopic aids.

**Visual Field:** Applicants must have at least 140 degrees of peripheral field, which will need to be itemized per eye (lateral, from fixation), for an unrestricted license. However, if one eye has at least a 70 degree temporal and 35 degree nasal field, the license will still be approved with an outside mirror restriction.

**Frequency of Renewals:** Unless there are reasons to the contrary, the frequency of license renewal is currently based on the following age-specific criteria:
- Age 87 & Over: Q 1 Year. Expires on birthday. Vision Exam Required.
*The “Safe Driver Renewal Program” provides that applicants age 21 – 75, who have had no moving violations during the renewal period, are eligible for a passive renewal (by mail or electronic) once, but still requires a vision exam once per maximum of 8 years.

**Early Renewals:** Up to age 86, applicants may renew up to year prior to their expiration date. For age 87 and over, early renewal by up to 6 months is allowed. The new expiration date will be calculated from the previous expiration date on application.

**Telescopic Aids:** Some drivers who do not qualify for a drivers license based on the above criteria may still be eligible for a license using a telescopic lens.
Details and minimum criteria are:

- Acuity must be 20/100 or better through the carrier lens, and 20/40 or better with the telescope.
- Peripheral visual field requirements are the same as non-telescopic drivers.
- The telescope must be in the possession of the applicant for at least 60 days prior to submitting the application.
- The telescope power may not exceed 3.0X(WA) or 2.2X(Std).
- A Vision Specialist Report is required annually. Initial telescopic licenses are all daylight only, but night driving may be requested after one year of accident-free driving, via an addendum to the Vision Specialist Report.

Vision Specialist Report

This form is available through local driver’s license examination offices, or through the Secretary of State’s website (www.cyberdriveillinois.com). Data from this form is considered valid for no more than six months from the examination date. According to JCAR (92/II/1030.70a), the only “vision specialists” eligible to use this reporting form are those “…licensed to practice medicine in optometry, test eyesight, prescribe eye lenses and perform glaucoma evaluations..” (effectively, this means an optometrist or ophthalmologist only, as other physicians will fail to meet this standard)

Special Circumstances

Occasionally, in the judgement of either the optometrist, family physician, or family member of the applicant, certain restrictions or a reduced license expiration term are warranted. Optometrists may outline recommended restrictions in Sections 5 & 6 of the Vision Specialist Report. For example, patients with progressive defects expected to preclude them from meeting minimum thresholds prior to their next scheduled license expiration can be given licenses for only 2 years, 1 year, or even 6 months.

It is also not unusual for patients to present to an optometric office with vision below the minimum threshold, although they may hold a current, valid license. If the optometrist is unable to improve vision to a “passing” level, there are tough decisions to make. Doctors are not currently held to a “mandated reporting” standard; however, thorough counseling is indicated, and pursuant to the doctor’s judgement, the local driver’s license examining office or Secretary of State’s office may need to be notified. In this instance, the State will cancel the license immediately, allowing 6 days for notification of the driver.

In the case of new telescopic drivers, it may be useful for the vision specialist to make referrals to occupational therapists certified in rehabilitation driving. These OTs will report the results of evaluation with in-office simulators, as well as other training and assessment, so that the vision specialist can have a better sense of driver readiness.

Other Questions or Issues
For answers to other questions about drivers license requirements and vision, contact your local drivers license examining office, or call the Secretary of State’s Medical Review Unit at (217) 782-7246.

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