



Road Safety Is for All Ages



Québec 

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Introduction

Because of changing demographics in Québec, seniors make up an increasingly greater proportion of road users. Studies show that health has a greater influence on the ability to drive than age. However, health issues usually tend to accumulate and worsen with age. Eventually, cognitive and sensory functions as well as mobility decline through the aging process even in a healthy person. These factors affect the ability to drive and safely travel on the road network.

Since seniors are physiologically more vulnerable, they are more likely to die or be left with serious and permanent impairment if they are involved in a traffic accident, regardless of whether they are in the vehicle or not. This means that they should be especially careful when using the road network.





Are you a senior citizen?

The SAAQ hopes this brochure will raise your awareness of road safety issues that are likely to affect you, and inform you on the tools that are available to help you face these issues. The goal is to enable all road users to safely maintain their mobility for as long as possible.

Driving

Most traffic accidents causing serious or fatal injuries involve vehicles. Driving is undeniably a complex activity. Holding a driver's licence is not a right. It is a privilege requiring licence holders to show respect for themselves and other road users when driving. To drive, you must:



— be in good physical and mental health;

For example, to drive, you must have:

- good eyesight,
- adequate muscular strength and controlled movement to be able to react quickly and skillfully,
- good cognitive functioning, such as memory, divided attention, judgment, and the ability to quickly analyze situations that arise,
- an alert mind and a good degree of vigilance;

— ensure your vehicle is in good working condition;

— be familiar with the traffic rules, signs and signals in force;

— have good driving skills;

— have good driving behaviours.

Drivers who do not meet all these requirements compromise their safety and that of other road users.

Health and driving: are seniors more at risk?

Age is not necessarily indicative of the ability to drive. Some people are able to drive well into their twilight years, while others have serious health issues that affect their driving at an early age. However, visual, cognitive and motor skills tend to decrease in every human being with age.

You need to be in good physical and mental health to drive, and maintaining healthy lifestyle habits helps keep you in good shape. It is important to have a balanced diet, get enough sleep, stay physically active and maintain your cognitive abilities by reading or doing other mentally stimulating activities.

However, even people with an exemplary lifestyle can experience a decline in their health over the years to the point where they have to stop driving. This decrease in physical and mental ability can happen gradually or overnight. The effects of normal aging generally appear slowly unless a disease appears and accelerates the process. Changes are gradual and we get used to them without really noticing.



To ensure that you still have the abilities required to drive, you should occasionally ask yourself the following questions:

- Are my movements limited when I am at the wheel?
- Have I had any fender benders in the last year?
- Do I need to be accompanied by someone to help me when I drive?
- Do I have difficulty yielding the right of way or negotiating a traffic circle?
- Do I have difficulty backing up?
- Do I sometimes forget things when I am driving like forgetting how to get somewhere?
- Do I have vision problems or health issues that hamper my driving?
- Do I sometimes have difficulty reading or understanding traffic signs or signals?
- Do other drivers regularly honk at me or try to get my attention?
- Are my friends or family members worried about my driving, or are they reluctant to get in the vehicle when I am the driver?

Licence holders who are unsure of their ability to drive safely should approach the subject with a family member, friend, their physician or other health care professional.

At any age, but especially as you become older, it is important to see your doctor for regular check-ups.

→ MEDICATION AND DRIVING

Taking prescription or over-the-counter drugs may be incompatible with safe driving. Some medication can affect your concentration, vision, physical coordination and behaviour. Generally speaking, medication use increases with age, while the liver's ability to process medication decreases resulting in increased side effects from medication. This puts elderly drivers at risk.

It is therefore important to carefully read the warnings on the packaging and to ask your doctor, nurse practitioner or pharmacist for information on the effects of medication on driving. You should also pay attention to non-prescription drugs and health products. Pharmacists can inform you on the combined effects of drugs taken the same day.



Every time there is a change in a driver's medication, whether it is a new medication or dosage, the driver should take the time to observe its effects before taking the wheel. Alcohol, even in small quantities, can increase the harmful effects of medication on driving.

Note that impaired driving legislation also applies to the effects of medication on the ability to drive. In other words, driving while under the influence of medication, whose side effects have an impact on the ability to drive and road safety, is a criminal offence.

→ DRIVER HEALTH: WHAT THE LAW SAYS

Under the *Highway Safety Code*, driver's licence holders must notify the SAAQ of any change in their state of health. This should be done before obtaining a driver's licence or a new class of licence, at the time of your driver's licence payment or renewal, or at any time within 30 days of the change. To do so, you can:

- go to an SAAQ service centre;
- contact the SAAQ by phone, email, or mail;
- ask a health care professional for an up-to-date medical assessment report, and return it to the SAAQ;
- fill out the section provided on your driver's licence renewal notice to declare an illness or functional disability;
- declare your illness or disability through the SAAQclic online portal.



→ MEDICAL AND EYE EXAMS FOR SENIORS AGED 75 OR OLDER

All Class 5, 6A, 6B, 6C, 6D, 6E and 8 driver's licence holders must undergo a medical assessment conducted by a health care professional when they turn 80, and every two years thereafter.

The SAAQ sends licence holders an explanatory letter along with the form or forms that need to be completed. They must return the duly completed and signed form or forms to the SAAQ within 90 days. The SAAQ then informs them of its decision. Licence holders who do not return the requested form or forms will have their licence suspended.

In March 2022, the SAAQ made this process easier for drivers aged 75 to 79 by waiving the required medical and eye exams. When licence holders turn 75, the SAAQ sends them a mandatory self-declaration of illness or functional impairment form. The form must be completed, signed and returned to the SAAQ within 90 days whether the licence holder has a health issue to report or not. In the event that certain health issues can have an impact on the licence holder's ability to drive, the SAAQ has the right to require them to submit medical or eye examination reports completed by a qualified health professional.

When the results of a medical or eye exam cast doubt on a licence holder's ability to drive, the SAAQ can request that the licence holder, regardless of age, take a road test to demonstrate their driving capabilities.

Very few people have their driver's licence suspended after completing this process. However, these monitoring procedures frequently result in new conditions being added to an individual's driver's licence, such as:

- driving only during daylight hours;
- wearing corrective lenses to drive;
- avoiding driving on the highway.

A vehicle in good condition: feel safe on the road

A vehicle that is in good condition increases the likelihood that the driver is in complete control on the road.

You should take your vehicle to a mechanic if you notice:

- any suspicious or unusual noise;
- questionable braking performance (speed or distance);
- leakage of any kind;
- worn windshield wiper blades that are no longer effective;
- excessive or uneven tread wear on the tires;
- obvious or suspected damage to any vehicle component.

Keeping your knowledge and driving techniques up to date

When it comes to road safety, relying on your many years of driving experience on the road network is not enough. New recommendations emerge, laws and regulations change over time, and sometimes new traffic control methods are established, for example, traffic circles or the Move-Over Law. Therefore, all drivers need to make sure that their theoretical knowledge about driving is up to date.



To do so, drivers can:

- consult reference material, in particular, the ***Driver's Handbook*** that covers highway regulations, Québec road signs, traffic violations and their consequences. The ***Driving a Passenger Vehicle*** guide used for learner drivers is also highly recommended;
- visit the SAAQ website where they can test their knowledge about road safety and driving an automobile;
- take a driving improvement course offered by a road safety agency like the CAA, or a driving school. Many driving schools offer a training program specifically for seniors that offers refresher courses for people who have not driven much in recent years, or who would like some guided practice before a road test requested by the SAAQ.

The *Driving a Passenger Vehicle* guide and the *Driver's Handbook* are available at the same places.



Turn the page to find out where.

Signs and signals: the keys to road safety

Whether you are travelling on foot, by bicycle, car or any other means, road signs and traffic signals are essential for road safety. Road signs, traffic lights and pavement markings provide information so that you can take the proper precautions.



Road signs

Misunderstanding certain road signs can increase the risk of accidents. We come across a variety of signs, so it might be a good idea to refresh your memory as to their meaning and use.

To do so, visit the Ministère des Transports et de la Mobilité durable website. The ***Driver's Handbook*** is also an excellent source of information.

Where can you get the *Driver's Handbook*?

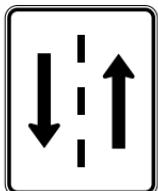
- A free downloadable copy is available in the **Publications du Québec** section of the SAAQ website;
- A paper copy can be purchased on the **Publications du Québec** website;
- At most public libraries.



Yield



No entry



Two-way traffic



No U-turn



Start of a school zone



No passing



School bus stop ahead



Road work ahead



Flagperson ahead



Prepare to stop

Traffic lights

All road users have a responsibility to thoroughly understand traffic lights which signal the right of way at intersections.

At traffic lights, pedestrians must:

- obey the pedestrian crossing lights when present:
 - a white pedestrian silhouette indicates that it is time to cross,
 - a flashing orange hand, sometimes with a numerical countdown, indicates that not much time is left to cross,
 - an orange hand that is not flashing tells pedestrians to wait before crossing;
- wait for the green light if no pedestrian crossing lights are present.

At traffic lights, cyclists wanting to cross must:

- wait for the green light, yield to pedestrians if no pedestrian crossing lights are present, and watch out for motorists who may be turning right;
- yield to pedestrians crossing the intersection, if pedestrian crossing lights are present, and ride at a reasonable and safe speed.

At traffic lights, motorists must:

- obey the traffic lights:
 - > go when the light turns green,
 - > prepare to stop when the light is amber,
 - > stop at a red light;
- check their blind spots for vulnerable road users such as pedestrians and cyclists before continuing in any direction;
- yield to these vulnerable road users.

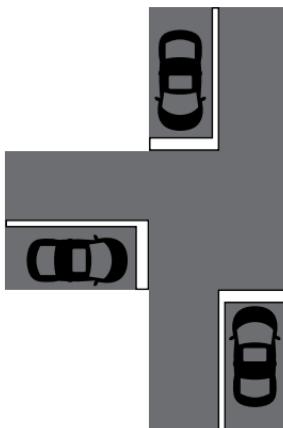


Pavement markings

Pavement markings are very important because they supplement indications on road signs and from traffic lights.

→ STOP LINE

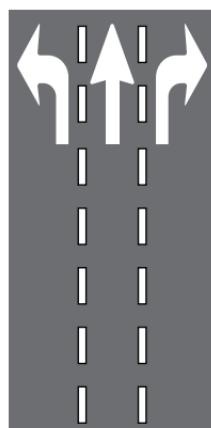
This mark shows where motorists must stop at an intersection.



→ LANE SEPARATION LINES

Arrows on the pavement indicate where motorists should be in order to do one of the following:

- turn left;
- turn right;
- go straight.

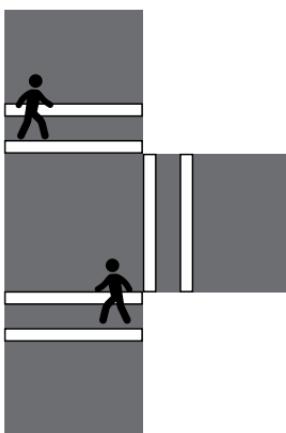




→ PEDESTRIAN CROSSINGS

White stripes or two parallel white lines indicate a pedestrian crossing at intersections with traffic lights or stop signs.

Pedestrian crosswalks are marked by yellow stripes between intersections or when there are no lights or stop signs. Motorists are required to yield the right of way to pedestrians crossing at these places and let them cross.



Parallel white lines



White stripes



Yellow stripes

→ SAFETY DEVICES PROTECT YOU

When used properly, seat belts, headrests and air bags can save lives.

Wearing a seat belt is now the norm for Quebecers. Indeed, buckling up has become a reflex for most people. It is good to know that using a seat belt in combination with air bags decreases the chances of serious head injuries by 75% in the event of a collision.

In addition, properly adjusted headrests can reduce the risk of whiplash by more than 25%.

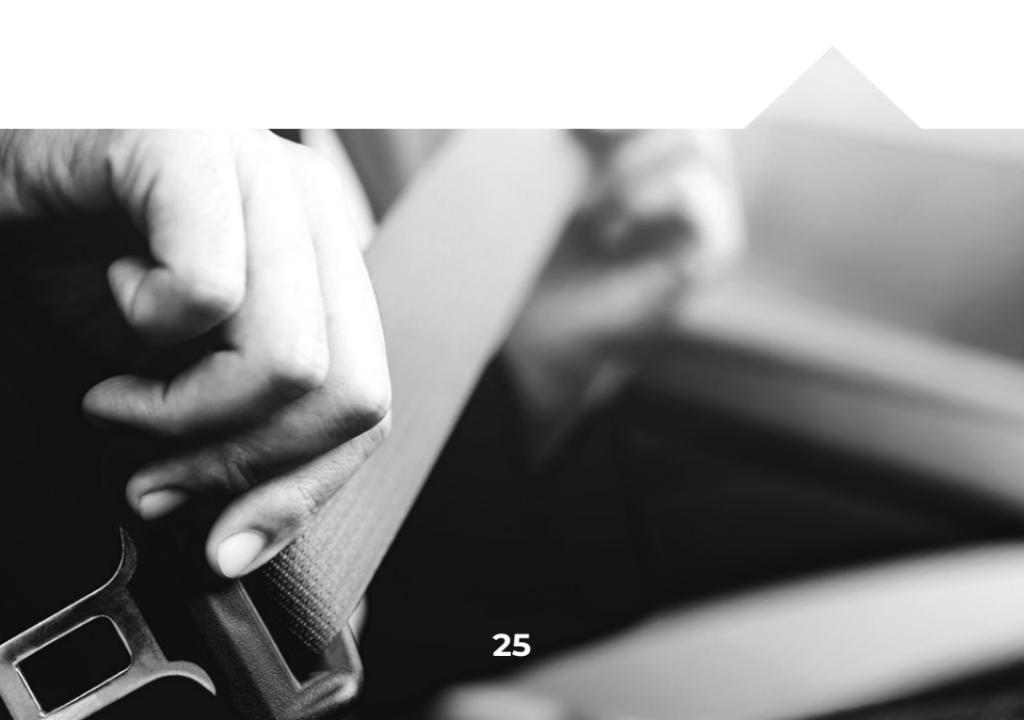
It is also important to properly secure all objects in the passenger compartment because any loose item can strike and injure the occupants in the event of a collision or sudden stop.



If there is an animal in the car, be sure that it does not obstruct the driver's vision or interfere with driving.

Just like an object, an unsecured animal can become a projectile or even be thrown from the vehicle in the event of a collision or sudden stop. For the safety of the animal and the passengers in the vehicle, the SAAQ recommends using a harness, placing the animal in a cage properly secured by a seat belt, or creating an enclosure using a safety barrier.

To reduce the risk of injury from a deployed air bag, a distance of at least 25 cm (10 inches) must be maintained between the air bag cover and the occupant.



Driving behaviour and precaution

When it comes to road safety, being courteous to other road users is essential. The precautionary principle, closely related to courtesy, is now an integral part of the *Highway Safety Code*.



PRECAUTIONARY PRINCIPLE

All road users have a duty, especially toward those who are more vulnerable, to be careful and considerate when travelling on a public highway.

Drivers of road vehicles have a duty to show extra care for more vulnerable users, particularly people with reduced mobility, pedestrians and cyclists.

Vulnerable road users must also adopt behaviours that ensure their own safety.

The precautionary principle is expressed when drivers follow certain basic rules:

- Obey traffic signs and signals, such as traffic lights, mandatory stops, speed limits and the obligation to yield the right of way.
- Respect other road users' right of way by yielding to pedestrians at pedestrian crosswalks and intersections. More specifically:
 - > **at intersections**, stop behind the stop line (solid white line):
 - when the pedestrian light is on or, if there is no pedestrian light, when a pedestrian is crossing at a green light,
 - before turning right at a red light,
 - at a stop sign (located at the intersection or held by a school crossing guard);
 - > **at pedestrian crosswalks**, stop behind the pedestrian crossing lines:
 - when a pedestrian enters the crosswalk or clearly demonstrates the intention to cross;



- > **at intersections**, check your blind spots for pedestrians:
 - before turning right, look behind the windshield pillars and over your right shoulder;
 - before turning left, look behind the windshield pillars and over your left shoulder;
- > **at intersections**, yield to any cyclists present. Check your blind spots for cyclists before turning. In addition to the usual checks, look over your right shoulder before turning right;
- > **at intersections**, make eye contact with more vulnerable road users and make a hand gesture letting them know they can cross.

- Signal your intention with your turn signal light.
- Do not tailgate other vehicles.
- When passing a pedestrian or a cyclist, leave them enough space:
 - > 1 m in a zone of 50 km/h or less;
 - > 1.5 m in a zone of more than 50 km/h.
- Before opening your door when your car is parked, check your blind spots to see whether a cyclist is approaching.

You could receive a fine if you violate some of these rules.

Furthermore, taking precaution is recommended driving behaviour. This is true for any driver, but is even more so for senior drivers or people with declining health. To stay safe at the wheel, driving habits sometimes need to be adjusted.



It may be a good idea to:

- plan for long trips and include rest stops along the way;
- drive only in familiar surroundings;
- refrain from driving during rush hour;
- avoid busy streets;
- quit driving at night or in bad weather;
- drive only when you feel well enough and rested;
- choose a hassle-free, driver-friendly vehicle (with automatic transmission, power accessories, etc.) that is suited to your particular physique. For example, consider visibility (window size) and driver's seat adjustability.

These precautions are easy to take and greatly reduce the risks associated with driving, and may even allow you to keep your licence for a longer period of time.



Getting around without a car

The ability to drive increases personal mobility and a sense of independence, while facilitating certain trips that could not be made otherwise. It is normal that the decision to stop driving is very difficult to make.

Giving up driving may leave you thinking that you will no longer have a social life or that you will become isolated. However, most drivers will eventually find themselves facing a decline in their fitness to drive. That is why it is important to examine all available alternatives.



Here are some examples:

- Choosing to live closer to essential services
- Taking the bus and other forms of public transit
- Car-pooling with friends and family
- Taking a taxi
- Using ride services offered by various community organizations
- Using paratransit services
- Engaging in active transportation

Local community health centres (CLSCs) are a good place to find out what resources are available in each region.



Active transportation

Active transportation is generally defined as any type of transportation requiring the use of your own physical power. This not only includes walking, cycling and jogging, but also using a manual wheelchair and in-line skating, to name only a few examples.

Active transportation benefits your health, protects the environment, and saves money, making it a great alternative to driving.

However, when we engage in active transportation, we become what is known as a "vulnerable" road user in comparison to a motorist. Seniors are even more vulnerable considering the increased frailty that comes with age. This means that they must adopt safe active transportation habits.



On foot

All pedestrians and any similar road user (e.g. manual wheelchair users, in-line skaters, etc.) should follow these fundamental safety rules:

- Always cross at intersections or pedestrian crosswalks where there are appropriate signs and pavement markings. When there are no intersections or pedestrian crosswalks, pedestrians must wait until the way is completely clear before crossing. Pedestrians must yield the right of way to motorists and cyclists in this instance since they have priority.

- At **pedestrian crosswalks**, pedestrians have priority. Drivers and cyclists must yield to them. However, for their safety, pedestrians must make sure that the drivers and cyclists have seen them and are in fact yielding the right of way.
- Before crossing, make sure you have been seen:
 - > avoid standing behind things that could hide you from view like bus shelters, posts, vehicles, trees, buildings, etc.;
 - > make eye contact with the drivers.

- Obey the traffic lights or the pedestrian lights when present at the intersection.
- If not much time is left to cross, for example if the light has been green for a while or the numerical countdown for pedestrians is about to end, consider waiting to cross with the next cycle.
- Look left, right, then left again before crossing the street.
- Use the sidewalk. If there is no sidewalk, walk on the side of the road, ideally facing oncoming traffic. Pedestrians can also decide to walk on the side of the road where the shoulder is wider or the lighting is better.
- To be visible when it is dark, wear brightly coloured clothing or reflective strips. Darkness is a pedestrian's enemy. Fall is the time when the highest number of accidents involving pedestrians occur.
- Watch out for heavy vehicles—their blind spots are larger than you may think. Before crossing the street behind or ahead of a heavy vehicle in motion, make sure you have been seen by the driver.



- Blind spots are those areas of the road that a heavy vehicle driver cannot see because of the vehicle's size or structure. Drivers cannot see other road users when they are in those areas, and the risk of collision is higher. You must avoid ending up in those blind spots.
- A heavy vehicle's blind spots are at the front, rear and sides.

In short, it is important to adopt predictable behaviours, obey the *Highway Safety Code* and avoid taking unnecessary risks.

By bicycle

Riding a bike is an excellent way to stay in shape. Seniors seem to have gotten on board based on the considerable increase in the number of older cyclists in Québec.

Bicycle safety starts with obeying the *Highway Safety Code* and adopting defensive cycling behaviours like wearing a helmet. Cyclists need to stay alert, have good vision, ensure that they are visible, and anticipate hazards.



In particular, the *Highway Safety Code* requires cyclists to:

- obey road signs and traffic signals;
- travel with the flow of traffic and as far to the right of the road as possible;
- signal their intentions using the appropriate hand signals, unless doing so endangers their safety;
- ride in single file when in a group;
- equip their bicycles with the mandatory lights and reflectors:
 - > one white reflector at the front,
 - > one authorized visibility accessory on each wheel,
 - > one red reflector at the rear,
 - > one amber or white reflector on each pedal;
- wear a helmet when riding an electric bike.

Wearing a helmet when riding a regular bike is strongly recommended.

However, the Code prohibits cyclists from riding:

- on sidewalks—except in case of necessity or where directed or authorized to do so by a sign or signal;
- while wearing earphones or headphones;
- while using a portable electronic device—whether held in their hand or not—unless it displays information that is relevant to riding a bicycle, in which case it must be mounted on a bracket that is attached to the bicycle.



→ **TO BE EXTRA CAREFUL, CYCLISTS
SHOULD WATCH OUT FOR:**

- vehicles turning right at a red light;
- car doors that may open suddenly;
- vehicles coming out of driveways;
- spaces between parked vehicles;
- city and school buses (frequent stops and starts). Before making a manoeuvre, eye contact with the driver must be established;
- heavy vehicle blind spots, as explained in the section on pedestrians.



Cyclists should also cross at intersections. There are two ways cyclists can safely turn left at an intersection:

- like a vehicle, by signaling their intention using the appropriate hand signal and staying in the left lane at the intersection;
- like a pedestrian, by making an L-shaped turn.

Unless otherwise indicated, cyclists can also cross with pedestrian lights. In such cases, cyclists must stop, yield the right of way to any pedestrians crossing the intersection, and ride at a safe and reasonable speed.

The ***Safe Cycling Guide***, available free of charge on the SAAQ website, provides more details on the traffic rules that apply to cyclists. It also gives cyclists excellent safety advice, including instructions on how to properly adjust their helmet.

Using motorized mobility aids

Three- and four-wheeled scooters and electric wheelchairs are considered motorized mobility aids. The rules that govern their use on the road network are complex, but clearly explained on the Ministère des Transports et de la Mobilité durable website.



Grandchildren buckled up so they stay safe

Grandparents often drive with their grandchildren. It is important to know that, under the *Highway Safety Code*, children who are less than 145 cm tall or who are under 9 years of age must be secured in a child safety seat that is appropriate for their weight and height.

Many types of child safety seats are available and designed on the basis of the child's weight. The **Secure Them for Life!** leaflet, available free of charge on the SAAQ website, explains how to properly install and use them. The website also contains detailed information and helpful video clips.



Warning!

The back seat is the safest place for children 12 years and under. In the back, they are the furthest away from impact zones in the event of a head-on collision, as well from the front air bags, which can cause serious or even fatal injuries.

The insurance plan for all road users



Quebecers are covered by the public automobile insurance plan if they sustain an injury in a road accident, regardless of where the accident occurred or who is at fault.

Property damage must be covered by liability insurance with a private insurance company.

If you plan to drive abroad, it is a good idea to increase your liability insurance coverage in the event of a lawsuit against you for bodily injury and third-party property damage.



The SAAQ can pay the following types of compensation to victims of an automobile accident:

- an income replacement indemnity;
- lump-sum compensation for permanent impairment;
- a death benefit for the victim's spouse or any dependants;
- lump-sum compensation to cover funeral expenses.

The SAAQ can also reimburse certain expenses in connection with the accident (e.g. medication, rehabilitation, home assistance, replacement or repair of damaged clothing).

To file a claim for compensation, you must order the necessary forms and documents by phone at
1-888-810-2525.



The role of friends and relatives

In some cases, due to health problems, drivers may no longer be able to assess their ability to drive safely. Their friends and relatives must watch for signs.

Although it is best to allow the driver to make the decision to stop driving, it is a difficult decision to make and some people will need help moving forward.

It is preferable, and often essential, that relatives participate in convincing their loved one with diminishing autonomy to stop driving.

There are a number of ways you can address the issue. The approach will depend on the driver's receptiveness and the urgency of the situation.

If the individual refuses to take action, help is available at local health and social service centres or by reporting the situation to the SAAQ.

Anyone who has doubts about a licence holder's ability to safely drive a vehicle can notify the SAAQ and describe the events witnessed that explain their doubts.

The information provided must make it possible to identify the driver, and can include their:

- name and date of birth;
- name and address;
- driver's licence number;
- name and vehicle's licence plate number.

To find out more

Many sources of information are available to anyone wanting to know more about road safety. We suggest the reference material listed below.



SAAQ leaflets and brochures (available online)

- *Heavy Vehicle Blind Spots – Be Vigilant!*
- *Secure Them for Life! – Child Safety Seats*
- *Attention aux véhicules lourds – Redoublez de prudence* (in French only)
- *Senior Drivers and Their Caregivers*

- *Move-Over Law – Adapt Your Driving*
- *Safe Cycling Guide*
- *In Winter – Adapt Your Driving*
- *At Night – Adapt Your Driving*
- *Carefree Travel Anywhere in the World*
- *The Insurance Policy for all Quebecers in the Event of Injury or Death Due to an Automobile Accident*
- *Sharing the Road Safely*
- *Crossing the Street Safely*
- *Why a Medical Assessment?*
- *Accessible Parking Permit – Spaces Reserved for You*

Other information brochures

- *Driver's Handbook*
Les Publications du Québec
- *Driving a Passenger Vehicle*
Les Publications du Québec

To contact us



By mail

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et des relations publiques**

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Online

saaq.gouv.qc.ca

To email us: courrier@saaq.gouv.qc.ca

To order leaflets:

documentation@saaq.gouv.qc.ca

By phone

Toll-free: 1-800-361-7620 (Québec, Canada, United States)

TDD/TTY

Deaf or hard of hearing persons

Montréal: 514-954-7763

Elsewhere in Québec: 1-800-565-7763 (toll-free)

In person

At one of our service centres. Call us before leaving.
In most cases, we can provide you with the information
you need.

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**Société de l'assurance
automobile**
Québec 

Avec vous,
au cœur de votre sécurité