

# Mandatory Alcohol Interlock Program

## Fact Sheet for Medical Practitioners



Transport  
Roads & Maritime  
Services

JANUARY 2015

**The NSW Government has passed legislation that will make it mandatory for drivers convicted of serious and repeat drink driving offences to participate in a mandatory alcohol interlock program.**

**NSW has had a voluntary alcohol interlock program since 2003, but the new mandatory program comes into effect from 1 February 2015.**

### **Q. What is happening?**

From 1 February 2015, courts will be required to order offenders convicted of high range, repeat and other serious drink driving offences to complete:

- a minimum licence disqualification period
- a minimum 12 month participation in the interlock program.

The court may grant exemptions only in exceptional circumstances.

### **Q. What is an interlock?**

Interlocks are electronic breath testing devices linked to a vehicle's ignition system.

Drivers must provide a breath sample that the interlock analyses for the presence of alcohol before the vehicle will start. Randomly timed breath tests must also be passed during a journey.

If at any time the interlock detects alcohol on the driver's breath, the vehicle's ignition system will be disabled.

### **The important role of doctors**

The involvement of doctors is essential to support the rehabilitative opportunities of the alcohol interlock program. They will help participants to:

- understand the need to separate drinking from driving
- understand their alcohol consumption and identify any alcohol dependency issues
- be referred for further alcohol dependency assessments and interventions if required.

Transport for NSW is working with medical stakeholders such as the Australian Medical Association and General Practice NSW to ensure as many doctors as possible are given the information they need to assess program participants.

Participants will be required to pay for all medical consultations and assessments they attend relating to the program, subject to the standard Medicare benefits.

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For further information:

Phone: 13 22 13

Web: [www.rms.nsw.gov.au/interlock](http://www.rms.nsw.gov.au/interlock)

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## Program entry

- The new program will require a preliminary medical consultation for each program participant before they can obtain an interlock licence.
- A person may attend their local GP for the consultation. Up to 6,000 offenders across the State could join the new program annually.
- This means all doctors may potentially be asked to conduct the initial medical consultation. Information will be provided to doctors about these consultations.
- The consultation is not a pass/fail. It will allow the participant to discuss their alcohol use with a doctor. It will provide an opportunity to identify harmful alcohol use and seek early treatment for any alcohol-related conditions.
- At the consultation, the doctor will be asked to sign a completed certificate. This must be submitted to Roads and Maritime Services by the participant before they can enter the interlock program.

## Monitoring participant performance

- During the program, Roads and Maritime will assess data taken from regular checks of participants' interlocks to identify those who are attempting to drive with alcohol in their system.
- If this behaviour continues, Roads and Maritime will send program participants a letter recommending that they visit a doctor.
- This gives participants an opportunity to discuss their drinking behaviour. It also gives doctors an opportunity to refer participants for further assessment and treatment regarding their alcohol use.
- While participants are not obliged to attend a doctor following this recommendation, Roads and Maritime will consider this when it assesses a participant's program performance.
- There will be no requirement for doctors to report back to Roads and Maritime.

## Fitness to Drive Assessment at program completion

- The last six months of the participant's interlock data will be reviewed by Roads and Maritime to identify whether they have safely separated drinking and driving.
- Those who have failed to do so, by attempting to drive with alcohol in their system, will be referred to a doctor for an assessment of their medical fitness to drive (Fitness to Drive Assessment).
- Transport for NSW is currently working with the members of the medical profession to identify the criteria that would prompt a Fitness to Drive Assessment.
- As part of this assessment, doctors will be asked to assess whether the participant is fit to drive without an interlock.
- Fitness to Drive Assessments will follow the Austroads Assessing Fitness to Drive for Commercial and Private Vehicle Drivers: Medical Standards for Licensing and Clinical Management Guidelines.

- Depending on the outcomes of this assessment, Roads and Maritime could extend the driver's interlock period to ensure that they continue to safely separate drinking and driving.

## **Aims of the new program**

The new program aims to reduce drink driving-related deaths and injuries on NSW roads. These are currently at about 15 per cent of the annual road toll. In 2013, alcohol was a factor in 50 deaths and 987 injuries.

The program will also help reduce the personal and community costs of drink driving-related deaths and injuries. During the five years 2008-2012, alcohol-related crashes cost NSW an estimated \$640 million annually.

Research shows that drivers previously convicted of drink driving are around four times more likely to be involved in a fatal crash than an average driver. The interlock program is designed to help drink drivers separate drinking and driving and reduce this road safety risk. It does this by keeping offenders in the licensing system on a closely monitored basis, with the interlock physically preventing drink driving.

It has also been found that data monitoring, medical interventions and counselling for interlock program participants may help achieve longer term behaviour change and extend road safety benefits beyond the time an interlock is installed.

The mandatory interlock program will be evaluated to assess the benefits it delivers to the community and to improve the program.

**The medical profession will continue to be consulted as materials about the interlock program are developed.**

**More detailed information about the program will be provided later in the year, including information to be included as part of a medical practitioner's professional development.**

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