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Factsheet 56 – December 2008

## New residents and visitors – driving in New Zealand

The information in this factsheet applies to licences for cars, motorcycles and heavy motor vehicles.

### Can I drive in New Zealand?

Do you have a current and valid\* **overseas driver licence** or **international driving permit**?

\*A **current and valid** overseas driver licence means that your licence allows you to legally drive in your own country. If you are disqualified from driving or your licence is currently suspended, expired or revoked, then you are **not** allowed to drive in New Zealand.

#### No – I don't have a current overseas driver licence or international driving permit

If you **do not** have a current overseas driver licence, you **cannot drive**.

You must apply for a New Zealand driver licence if you wish to drive here. See [Factsheet 45 Learning to drive: How to get your licence](#) for more information.

#### Yes – I do have a current overseas driver licence or international driving permit

If you **do** have a current and valid **overseas driver licence** or **international driving permit**, you can drive using that for a **maximum of 12 months** from the date you arrive in New Zealand. **Note:** if your overseas licence or permit isn't in English, you must carry an accurate translation. See [Other information you need to know](#) below for more information.

Each time you visit New Zealand, you can drive for a further 12-month period on your overseas licence or international driving permit.

#### What happens after one year?

If you wish to drive after one year, you must first gain a New Zealand driver licence. We recommend you apply early to make sure you have a new licence before the one year is up.

Forms to use to apply for an overseas licence conversion are available from the NZ Transport Agency (NZTA) [driver licensing agents](#).

Depending on the country you have come from, you may have to pass **theory** and/or a **practical driving tests**.

### Questions and answers

#### What happens if I don't apply for a New Zealand driver licence?

If you do not apply for a New Zealand driver licence within one year of arriving, you'll be considered **unlicensed** and you must not drive. You could be charged by the Police if you are caught driving and you may not be able to get car insurance.

If you are unlicensed, are told by the Police not to drive and are then caught driving by the Police, the vehicle you are driving will be seized at the roadside and impounded for 28 days.

## Do I have to sit any tests?

All drivers must know the road rules, what the road signs mean and how to drive safely. Learning the road rules is particularly important because of New Zealand's unique Give Way rule (when you are turning left, you must give way to vehicles that are coming from the opposite direction and turning right). You can find out more about this rule and others in [The official New Zealand road code](#).

Some countries require similar driving skills and have similar licensing systems to New Zealand's. Depending on the country you have come from and the class of licence you are converting, you may not have to sit **theory** and/or **practical tests**. Other countries may have driver licensing systems that are very different from New Zealand's. People from these countries **do** have to sit both **theory** and **practical tests**.

### Theory test?

You **do not** have to sit the theory test if:

- you have a licence from Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom or the United States of America, and
- your licence is current (or has expired less than 12 months), and
- you are converting a car or a motorcycle licence.

You **do** have to sit a theory test if:

- you have a licence from a country not listed above; or
- you are converting a heavy vehicle licence from any country.

### Practical test

You **do not** have to sit the practical test if:

- you have a licence from Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom or the United States of America, and
- your licence is current (or has expired less than 12 months), and
- you have held that licence for more than two years.

You **do** have to sit the practical test if:

- you have a licence from a country not listed above, or
- you have a licence from a country which is listed above but you have held that licence for less than two years.

## What happens if I pass the theory test?

When you have passed the theory test you will get a New Zealand driver licence and you can no longer use your overseas driver licence for driving in New Zealand, even if you have been here **less** than one year.

If your New Zealand driver licence has been issued with any conditions, you must adhere to them. For example, if you are required to pass the practical test and have not yet done so, you will have a 'supervisor condition'. This means you must be accompanied by a supervisor at all times when you drive.

Your supervisor must be someone who holds a full New Zealand driver licence and has held it for at least two years. The supervisor must sit in the front passenger seat.

**Note:** The supervisor condition does not apply to motorcycles, but you cannot ride a motorcycle over 250cc.

## What happens if I fail the theory or practical test?

If you fail the **theory** test and have been in New Zealand for **more** than one year, you **must not** drive in

New Zealand. You can apply to sit the test again.

If you fail the **practical** test, you must continue to be accompanied by a supervisor when you drive until you resit and pass the test.

### What about motorcycles and heavy vehicles?

Different types of vehicle are grouped into 'classes'. There are different theory tests and practical tests for different classes:

- Class 1 covers cars and other light-weight motor vehicles.
- Classes 2–5 cover different types of heavy vehicle, such as trucks.
- Class 6 covers motorcycles.

Most people will sit the theory and practical tests for a Class 1 licence. If you had a motorcycle licence and wish to continue riding, you will need to sit different theory and practical tests for a Class 6 licence. If you drove trucks and want to do so here, or want to have both a car and a motorcycle licence, make sure you tell the driver licensing agent which licence classes you want to sit tests for (see [Factsheet 11 Driver licence classes](#) for more information).

### Can I drive to earn money?

If you want to earn a living from driving you will probably have to convert your overseas licence to a New Zealand driver licence first, and you may also need to get a **driver licence endorsement**. You will certainly need to do so if you want to deal with the public or carry dangerous goods. For example, before you can earn money carrying passengers, driving a tow truck, or working as a driving instructor or testing officer, you must complete courses, pass exams and be cleared by a Police check in New Zealand.

Contact any [NZTA office](#) or phone our driver licensing contact centre on 0800 822 422 to find out more.

### What happens if my licence is suspended or disqualified while driving in New Zealand?

If you're using an overseas licence to drive in New Zealand and are then suspended or disqualified from driving by a New Zealand court, you can no longer use your overseas licence to drive in New Zealand. If you want to drive in New Zealand (after your disqualification or suspension has ended) you will need to apply for a New Zealand licence.

## What else do I need to know

### Carry your licence when you're driving

In New Zealand, you must have your driver licence or international driving permit with you at all times when you're driving. If your overseas licence or permit is not in English, you must carry an acceptable English translation issued by:

- a [translation service](#) that has been authorised by the NZTA, or
- a diplomatic representative at a high commission, embassy or consulate, or
- the authority that issued your overseas licence (an international driving permit may be acceptable as a translation).

### Meet the eyesight requirements

You must prove that your eyesight meets the required standard each time you apply for a new licence class or endorsement or renew your licence. To do this, you can:

- present a satisfactory eyesight certificate issued by a New Zealand-registered optometrist (this certificate must be no more than 60 days old)
- present a satisfactory medical certificate issued by a New Zealand-registered medical practitioner (this certificate must be no more than 60 days old and must specifically cover eyesight)
- pass an eyesight screening check at a driver licensing agent.

**Note:** the agents' eyesight screening machines eliminate the need for many drivers to be tested by an

optometrist or medical practitioner. However, if you don't pass the screening check, then you must provide one of the certificates listed **before** your application can proceed. Some drivers choose to provide a certificate instead of taking a screening check. If you have vision in only one eye, you must present an eye certificate from a doctor or optometrist.

## Action the Police can take

You can find out more about action the Police can take in [Factsheet 55 Driving offences and their penalties](#). Action the Police may take includes the following:

### Roadside licence suspension

Roadside licence suspension means the Police seize a driver's licence and immediately suspend them from driving for 28 days, in addition to any other charges. This can happen if you:

- are caught driving at slightly more than one-and-a-half times the legal alcohol limit
- refuse to supply a blood sample to be tested for excess blood alcohol
- are caught driving at more than 40 km/h above a permanent speed limit (other than by speed cameras)
- are caught for a drink drive offence where the driver has one previous drink drive conviction in the last four years.

For more information on roadside licence suspension, see [Factsheet 62 Suspension of your licence at the roadside](#).

### Roadside vehicle impoundment

Roadside vehicle impoundment means the Police can seize and impound a vehicle for 28 days. A fee has to be paid before the vehicle is released. This can happen if you:


- race other drivers or perform any other street-racer stunts (wheelies, unnecessary displays of speed, etc)
- drive while disqualified
- drive while your licence is suspended or revoked
- drive while you are unlicensed and have been previously forbidden to drive until you get a licence
- drive while your licence has expired and when you have previously been forbidden to drive
- are caught for a drink drive offence where the driver has two previous drink drive convictions in the last four years.

For more information on roadside vehicle impoundment, see [Factsheet 63 Impoundment of your vehicle at the roadside](#).

## Where you can find out more

- If you've moved to New Zealand to live, read the [New resident drivers](#) brochure. This provides an overview of New Zealand driving rules and behaviours that you'll need to know about before you begin driving on our roads. It's available in English, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Fijian, Samoan, Hindi and Malay. Phone our driver licensing contact centre on 0800 822 422 to order a copy.
- If you're in New Zealand for a short stay, read the brochure [What's different about driving in New Zealand?](#). This gives you brief advice on aspects of driving in New Zealand that you may be unfamiliar with. It's written in English and has sections translated into German, Japanese, Korean and Chinese. Phone our driver licensing contact centre on 0800 822 422 to order a copy.
- Also available on our website:
  - [factsheets](#) on other aspects of driver licensing and road safety
  - [information for motorists](#)
  - [The official New Zealand road code](#).
- Drivers who are new to our roads, people learning to drive and people wanting to gain a new licence class must make use of the appropriate version of **The official New Zealand road code**. (There are different versions for cars, motorcycles and heavy vehicles.) [The road code](#) contains information you need to know to get a driver licence. It also has lots of information to help drivers be safe and courteous on the road.

You can get copies of **The official New Zealand road code** from bookstores, driver licensing agents and some public libraries.

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- If you have questions about driver licensing, phone our driver licensing contact centre: 0800 822 422.
  - If you prefer, you can write to us: Transport Registry Centre (NZ Transport Agency), Private Bag 11777, Palmerston North 4442.