

What Every Carrier Needs to Know About DOT Medical Cards



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Driving a Commercial Truck is a physically taxing process that takes a significant toll on the body. Drivers need to be in the best health possible to withstand the rigors of this work. Therefore, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) requires all drivers to have a medical card that indicates whether they are healthy enough to drive safely.

What Is a Medical Card?

DOT medical cards are a requirement for maintaining a commercial motor vehicle license. This card, more like a certificate, is a requirement for all commercial drivers of interstate commerce vehicles weighing over 10,000 pounds. For in-state truckers, most states also have similar medical card laws.

Only a qualified medical professional can complete the exam and issue approval for this type of card. To complete the certification process, a driver needs to go through a series of screenings to determine if they have any underlying conditions that could prohibit them from operating a motor vehicle safely, including:

- A full physical exam
- Medical history documented
- Vital signs taken
- Vision test
- Hearing test
- Urine test

If a person passes these tests, the DOT medical card is approved. The card will remain valid for up to 24 months before it is necessary to repeat the process and get recertified.

What Happens When a Driver Fails a DOT Medical Exam?

Receiving and maintaining your medical card is necessary to continue operating trucks legally on roadways. If a driver fails their medical exam, they may be barred from driving for a period, which can put carriers at risk of being understaffed and unable to complete their usual routes.

In 2016, the U.S. Department of Transportation reported that **1.98% of DOT securitysensitive employee drug tests** led to positive results. That includes tests from random testing, pre-employment screenings, return-to-duty tests, medical examinations, and post-accident testing. That year, there were 5.5 million lab-reported random DOT tests conducted.

There are exemptions for some drivers who do not pass the test but have various medical conditions. If the driver can prove that they can operate a commercial motor vehicle safely, they may be able to continue to work in the field. For example, suppose they have diabetes but have it controlled and do not have complications that limit their ability to drive, such as vision loss. In that case, they may still be able to obtain their medical card and continue driving.

If a person fails their testing or does not provide an authentic result from a qualified medical professional, they are likely to be unable to drive a truck legally. Drivers can obtain a second opinion if they are truthful about their medical records. Drivers who lie about their health could face significant fines for being disqualified from commercial truck driving.

For these reasons, all commercial truck carriers must work closely with their drivers, doctors, and other key staff to ensure their drivers' health is the best.

