

Hearing-impaired can get their driving licence without any hassle

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• The Centre has asked states not to deny driving licences to hearing-impaired people, citing an AIIMS report that says a deaf driver with proper hearing aid does not pose a threat to fellow drivers.

People with hearing disabilities can now undergo a medical test if they are using a hearing aid, and get a licence.

The Union road transport ministry sought the views of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in June after complaints that hearing-impaired people are often harassed or disqualified deliberately in medical tests for a driving licence.

After the country's premier medical institution gave its report, ministry issued the request in its communication to the states on October 28.

“Driving is primarily a visual function with little inputs from hearing...” Dr Kapil Sikka, an ENT specialist at AIIMS, wrote to the ministry.

“If a person is rehabilitated with hearing amplification (hearing aid or cochlear implant) and can hear reasonably” with the device, “there seems little reason to deprive him or her” of a driving licence, the specialist said.

“This is important with regard to opportunities we wish to grant to the disabled.”

The move complements the Narendra Modi government’s push to make India a disabled-friendly nation.

The road ministry recently exempted specially-built vehicles driven by people with physical disabilities from paying toll on national highways.

The AIIMS report suggests a car driven by a hearing-impaired person should have a sign on the rear windshield informing the driver’s disability. “The applicants should take a stringent driving test under actual road conditions,” it says.

In the US and European countries, deaf people are allowed to drive after clearing a driving test.

The Delhi high court in 2011 ruled that the hearing-impaired can get a licence after passing a driving test. But road transport ministry officials disqualification because of discrimination against people with disabilities is rampant.

Until the 2011 order, the central motor vehicle rules barred deaf people from driving on the grounds that they pose a threat to fellow commuters.