

**Transportation
Safety**

**Training
ADVISOR**



October 2026

Physical Exams & Med Card Requirements

Where fitness meets compliance

**2026 rulemaking agenda
includes new initiatives**

Cuts made but still costs rise

**How long can a CDL driver
use a medical card as proof?**

Information and resources to help your drivers operate safely


**J. J. Keller
& Associates, Inc.**
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MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

5 core practices that drive training success

By mastering these core practices, trainers can boost engagement, improve learning outcomes, and deliver sessions that truly stick.

Be ready, look ready

Looking prepared goes well beyond having a solid lesson plan. It's about presenting yourself in a way that builds confidence before the session begins.

- Dress professionally to reinforce credibility and show that training matters.
- Bring enough handouts for every driver, plus a few extras.
- Arrive early to organize your materials, gather your thoughts, and welcome participants as they arrive.
- Make sure all your electronic or technical equipment functions properly.

Start on time

Beginning your session at the scheduled time sends a clear message. It conveys that the training is important, and so are your drivers' schedules. Starting late can frustrate those who arrived early or on time and can diminish your credibility before the session even begins. A timely start keeps the group focused and ready.

Open with purpose and perspective

Begin each session by helping drivers understand the purpose of the training and why it matters.

To craft an effective introduction, put yourself in your drivers' place. If you were attending the session, what would you want to know about it before starting? Framing the session from the drivers' perspective creates early engagement and helps participants see the session's value.

Set the tone

A lack of enthusiasm can quickly drain energy from a training session, no matter how strong the content is. Displaying confidence and passion for the topic demonstrates your belief in its importance. When drivers see that you care, they're far more likely to stay engaged.

End on time

Running beyond the scheduled end time can make drivers restless and reduce the impact of your session. Plan to finish about 10 minutes early. This gives you flexibility for discussion, clarifications, or final questions, while still honoring everyone's time. A timely wrap-up helps ensure your session ends with clarity and confidence. ♦



Lucero Truskowski

Lucero Truskowski joined J. J. Keller & Associates, Inc. as an Associate Editor in 2022. Lucero edits, writes, and researches content on a variety of topics, including transportation, human resources, and driver training. She holds a Master of Science (MS) in Professional Writing from New York University.



TRAINING BLUEPRINT — PHYSICAL EXAMS

Where fitness meets compliance

Physical examinations are mandatory for commercial motor vehicle (CMV) drivers to ensure they're physically qualified to drive. Such exams must be repeated at least every 2 years, although medical examiners (MEs) can choose to set a more frequent renewal cycle based on a driver's medical condition. A successful medical exam results in the ME completing a Medical Examiner's Certificate (MEC) — also known as the wallet card or med card — that serves as the driver's proof of being physically qualified.

At all times, drivers and the motor carriers employing them must be able to show proof that the driver is physically qualified to drive. This is achieved either through the med card, or, for drivers with a commercial driver's license (CDL), by means of a current driving record from the state.

CDL drivers, on and after June 23, 2025, no longer receive an MEC, unless they ask for one.

TIP: Print handouts outlining drivers' overall medical certification requirements and make them available for any driver who needs it.

Physical qualifications and examinations

The purpose of the physical qualification requirements is to make certain that a driver doesn't have a physical or mental condition that could seriously affect their ability to safely control a CMV.

Just a few of the conditions that could prohibit a driver from receiving a med card include if the driver:

- Has lost a foot, leg, hand, or arm, and hasn't been granted a skill performance evaluation certificate;
- Has diabetes requiring insulin for control (unless the requirements in 391.46 are met);
- Has heart disease, which causes chest pain, fainting, or shortness of breath;
- Has chest or breathing problems like chronic asthma, emphysema, and chronic bronchitis likely to interfere with control and driving of a CMV.

Medical exam

Medical exams are required:

- Prior to the first time a driver operates a CMV;
- Once every 24 months after the initial exam;

- Once every 12 months if the driver:
 - Exclusively operates within an exempt intracity zone; or
 - Has diabetes mellitus treated with insulin for control and has met the requirements in 391.46;
- When a driver's ability to operate a CMV is impaired by a physical or mental disease; and
- When an ME determines that a driver isn't physically qualified to operate a CMV and this is reported to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA), resulting in the invalidation of all medical certificates previously issued to the driver (as of June 23, 2025).

The medical exam must be performed by an ME who's certified by the FMCSA and listed on the National Registry of Certified Medical Examiners (NRCME).

Certified MEs from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) may perform driver medical exams, but only for veterans enrolled in the VA healthcare system.

A licensed optometrist may perform the visual portion of the exam.

TIP: Hold a question-and-answer session to address any questions your drivers may have about medical exams.

Medical examiner's certificate

If the ME finds that a driver is physically qualified to drive a CMV, the ME will fill out an MEC.

Since June 23, 2025, if the ME finds that the CDL driver is physically qualified to drive a CMV, the examiner will complete a CMV Driver Medical Examination Results Form (MCSA-5850) in the NRCME and that information will transfer to the driver's state licensing authority. Upon receiving this information, the state will post a medical qualification status of "certified" on the driver's motor vehicle record (MVR) along with other required exam information. As of August 2026, there are three states (AK, LA, NH) that aren't connected to the NRCME. CDL drivers in these states must continue to submit their MEC information directly to the state.

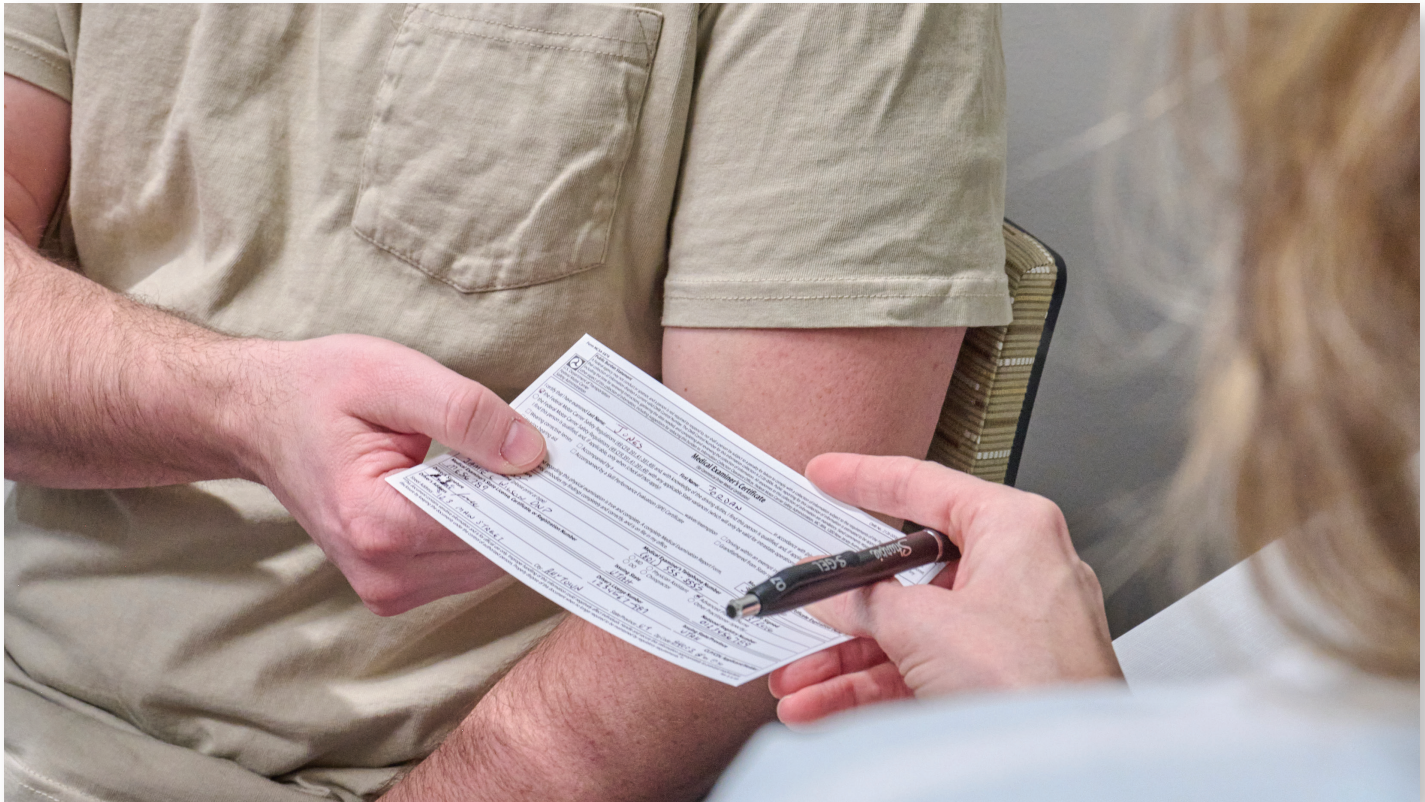
If there's a conflict between the medical certification information provided electronically by the FMCSA and the paper copy of the MEC, the electronic certification is considered the correct document. ♦



TRAINING HANDOUT — PHYSICAL EXAMS

Medical certification requirements

Driver type	Requirements
Interstate (non-commercial driver's license (non-CDL))	Driver must carry a valid medical certificate (med card) while driving a commercial motor vehicle (CMV) and a copy must be in the Driver Qualification (DQ) file.
Interstate (CDL/commercial learner's permit (CLP))	Driver must self-certify their driving tier with their state driver's licensing authority when receiving a CDL/CLP for the first time or when renewing or upgrading the CDL/CLP. Medical certification information on the driver's motor vehicle record (MVR) is updated by the state driver's licensing authority. A copy of the MVR must be maintained in the DQ file. The driver isn't required to carry a med card.
Intrastate (CDL, CLP, and non-CDL)	Drivers must comply with the state's requirements, which may vary from the above. ♦
Subject to state medical standards	





TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE — PHYSICAL EXAMS

1. A medical exam is required:

- A. Prior to the first time a driver operates a CMV
- B. Once every 24 months after the initial exam
- C. Once every 12 months if the driver has met the requirements in 391.46
- D. All of the above

2. A Medical Examiner's Certificate (MEC) is also known as the wallet card or med card.

- A. True
- B. False

3. Who can perform a driver's DOT medical exam?

- A. Driver's personal physician
- B. A licensed medical examiner
- C. An NRCME certified examiner
- D. None of the above

4. A driver may be asked to undergo physical exams more often than every 2 years.

- A. True
- B. False

5. Some conditions that would prohibit a driver from receiving a med card include:

- A. Losing a foot, leg, hand, or arm, and wasn't granted a skill performance evaluation certificate
- B. Having diabetes requiring insulin for control (unless the requirements in 391.46 are met)
- C. Having heart disease that causes chest pain, fainting, or shortness of breath
- D. All of the above ♦

NAME: _____ **DATE:** _____



Latest rulemaking agenda includes several new initiatives

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's (FMCSA's) latest rulemaking agenda includes several new initiatives aimed at strengthening driver qualification enforcement, reducing fraud, and tightening the oversight of regulated entities.

English-language proficiency

One potential change would make noncompliance with the English-language proficiency standard an out-of-service (OOS) violation. The rules in 49 CFR 391.11 have long stated that commercial drivers must be able to read and speak English well enough to converse with the public, understand highway signs and signals, respond to official inquiries, and make entries on reports and records. The FMCSA issued enforcement guidance in 2025 directing roadside enforcement personnel to place drivers OOS for noncompliance, and now the agency may change its regulations to make the guidance permanent.

CDL and CLP standards

The FMCSA also plans to propose changes to its commercial driver's license (CDL) and commercial learner's permit (CLP) standards. According to the agenda, the proposal would enhance security standards for CDLs and CLPs, strengthen the integrity of the issuance process, reduce the risk of fraud, and update document-verification and record-retention requirements.

Driver training

Another proposal would focus on the Entry-Level Driver Training (ELDT) program and the Training Provider

Registry (TPR). The FMCSA says it has identified noncompliance among some listed training providers, undermining confidence in the ELDT program and creating an uneven playing field for providers that follow the rules. The agency says stronger standards would apply

both to the initial listing and continued listing on the TPR, with the removal of providers that don't meet program requirements.

Broker qualifications

The FMCSA also expects a proposal addressing broker and freight forwarder qualifications. The rulemaking would implement a federal law saying that brokers and freight forwarders must employ, as an officer, an individual who

has either 3 years of relevant experience or satisfactory evidence of knowing all the relevant regulations and industry best practices.

Deregulatory proposal

Finally, the FMCSA plans a deregulatory proposal to rescind 49 CFR Part 374, which contains passenger-carrier regulations transferred from the former Interstate Commerce Commission. The FMCSA says it doesn't regularly attempt enforcement of those rules, including rules for smoking, bathroom cleanliness, bus temperature, and ticketing.

Next steps

Carriers should keep an eye out for these proposed rules so they can review how the changes and updates might impact their operations. The FMCSA will be seeking public comment as each proposed rule is posted, so don't miss out on the opportunity to influence the updates that affect your team. ♦



Cuts were made but costs continue to rise

The cost of operating a truck hit a record \$2.34 per mile last year as rising expenses continued to outpace freight rates and squeeze carrier profitability, according to the latest analysis from the American Transportation Research Institute (ATRI).

The findings are part of ATRI's 2026 *Analysis of the Operational Costs of Trucking* report, detailing both accelerating costs and low profitability in the trucking industry.

According to ATRI, the average cost to operate a truck in 2025, including fuel, was \$2.336 per mile, which is the

highest reported per-mile cost to date and 3.4 percent higher than the cost in 2024.

An effort to cut

Carriers across the nation reduced truck counts by 2.4 percent and left 10 percent of trucks unseated to help cut operating costs during and after the freight recession in 2022, according to the report. Efforts to reduce costs also came in the form of reduced non-driver staff levels (cut by 7.8 percent) and a reliance on older trucks with higher annual mileage.

Even with these attempts to relieve costs, carrier profits were still low, with ATRI reporting that operating margins in the truckload and refrigerated sectors remained below 1.0 percent, tank carriers were averaging 4.0 percent, and large fleets with 1,000+ trucks maintained flat margins year over year.

Rising costs despite the cuts

ATRI reported that costs rose in all major line-items, most notably:

- Tolls (up 13.2 percent),
- Repair and maintenance (up 8.6 percent),
- Driver benefits (up 6.6 percent), and
- Tires (up 6.4 percent).

The report also notes that fuel and driver pay both rose at sub-inflationary rates, and that first quarter 2026 data followed most of the same 2025 cost trends.

Final thoughts

The ultimate takeaways are that fleets should continue to stay ahead of costs by exercising discipline and that using ATRI's benchmarking report can help inform ongoing cost management strategies. ♦

Answers to quiz on page 5:

1.) D 2.) A 3.) C 4.) A 5.) D



Next Month's Topic: ELDs/Hours of Service

The hours-of-service (HOS) regulations, located in Part 395 of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations, limit the number of hours an individual operating a commercial motor vehicle can drive, as well as the number of allowable on-duty hours. Compliance with HOS regulations includes a robust understanding of driving limits and accurate and complete records of duty status. ♦



Expert Help: Question of the Month

Question: How long can a CDL driver use a DOT medical card as proof of medical certification?

Answer: Under a current Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) exemption, a CDL driver and motor carrier may use the driver's Medical Examiner's Certificate (MEC) as proof of medical certification for up to 60 days from the date of the examination. This exemption is scheduled to remain in effect through October 11, 2026.

Outside of this exemption, there is no grace period that allows carriers to rely on the MEC in place of the driver's CDL medical certification record. As a result, carriers should work to obtain and verify updated medical certification information as soon as possible after the driver's exam.

Scheduling a driver's medical exam in advance of expiration will help avoid potential issues. ♦



Expert Help

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EDITOR: Lucero Truszkowski

ISSN 2688-1616

GST R123-317687

(78544)

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