

EQUIPPING DRIVERS FOR EMERGENCIES: CPR IN THE DRIVING LICENSE DIRECTIVE

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Context

In November 2025, the European Commission adopted a revised [Driving License Directive](#), introducing a new requirement for new drivers to have knowledge of first aid and CPR. Specifically, driving theory tests are to include questions on basic first aid and CPR knowledge.

This provision represents an opportunity to improve emergency response to road accidents across the Union. Member States retain flexibility in how they transpose the Directive into national law which allows them to develop comprehensive first aid education strategies for new drivers. The aim is not only to improve the retention of CPR knowledge but also to equip citizens with skills that extend beyond responding to road accidents, fostering broader community safety awareness.

Currently, 12 EU Member States have made Basic Life Support (BLS) course mandatory to obtain a category B driving license, which allows drivers to act in an emergency on the road and beyond. BLS is the first-line intervention for someone in cardiac arrest. The training focuses on essential life-saving actions that anyone can perform, including CPR and the use of an Automated External Defibrillator (AED).

Objective

The event aimed to showcase how Member States are already implementing this requirement, identify which first aid and CPR training methods lead to the greatest knowledge retention, and foster discussion on the key barriers to implementing basic life support across all Member States, along with practical solutions to overcome them.

Key Takeaways

- Awareness campaigns should prioritise practical CPR training and, at the same time, provide a theoretical component explaining how the AEDs work, empowering citizens to intervene when witnessing a sudden cardiac arrest.
- Countries that have made CPR training mandatory as part of their driving test report significantly lower rates of sudden cardiac death.
- Effective CPR awareness campaigns rely on close collaboration between national resuscitation councils, road safety organisations, transport agencies, and drivers' associations.
- The ERC guidelines present a tool to increase survival and guarantee equity, including, for the first time, mandatory CPR training for school-age children.



Next Steps

National Resuscitation Councils are collaborating with transport and drivers' associations to ensure that the first aid requirements of the revised Directive are implemented in national jurisdictions in ways that maximise CPR knowledge retention.

The legislation is expected to be implemented in Member States by 2029.

Presentations

Manuel Picardi, General Secretary of the European Driving Schools Associations (EFA) presented the work EFA is conducting in collaboration with the European Resuscitation Council (ERC) and the opportunities that the revised Driving License Directive (DLD) opens for road safety.

Among the amendments presented by EFA and accepted in the new DLD, there is the possibility of taking CPR courses to obtain a driving license, for instance, *“Member States can exempt applicants from the questions regarding the basic knowledge of first aid [...] where the applicant has concluded certified first aid practical training, including cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) any time before the test of skills and behaviour is taken”*.

Across Member States, requirements for CPR instructors remain fragmented, as the Commission did not accept the suggested amendments to this. Manuel Picardi outlined EFA's proactive efforts to address this disparity through the introduction of its new International Certification of Driving Instructors, commencing in 2026. This certification mandates CPR proficiency for all accredited instructors, thereby establishing a harmonised standard where official policy currently falls short.

Federico Semeraro, President of the European Resuscitation Council, presented compelling data on sudden cardiac deaths across Europe, reporting approximately 1000 fatalities daily. He underscored the critical seven-minute window for bystander resuscitation, emphasising that timely intervention within this period is pivotal to prevent irreversible brain damage.

Dr Semeraro also highlighted the current bystander CPR rate, which stands at 59.4%. Furthermore, the presentation introduced the new **ERC Guideline 2025: 'Systems Saving Lives'**, which strongly advocates for robust government leadership through policy initiatives, mandatory CPR training, and enhanced stakeholder coordination, exemplified by collaborations between driving organisations and the ERC.

Wendy Hardyman (Save a Life Cymru Academic Hub, Cardiff Metropolitan University), **Isabelle Hamilton-Bower** (Resuscitation Council UK) and **Helen Luker** (UK Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency, DVSA) underscored the importance of reframing the narrative surrounding CPR and defibrillation skills. They advocated for embedding knowledge of these skills across the lifespan, emphasising the importance of raising public awareness and increasing the number



of individuals familiar with how to perform CPR and use an automated external defibrillator, or AED (when guided by an emergency call-taker), in the event of a cardiac arrest.

New questions on CPR and defibrillation have been incorporated into the UK driving theory test (a precursor to the practical test) thereby raising driver awareness of CPR and use of an AED. The new questions were introduced from improved source texts, which did not require legislative change to update. Additional resources, such as face-to-face training opportunities, interactive e-learning, videos and social media content, were also included to broaden engagement and improve access for learners. This was a collaborative initiative involving Save a Life programmes in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, Resuscitation Council UK and the DVSA.

Discussion

Hands-on CPR training must be prioritised

The Belgian National Resuscitation Council (NRC) highlighted that the Brussels Region is the only one in Belgium that requires mandatory first aid training for new drivers. They underscored the critical importance of complementing CPR awareness with hands-on resuscitation techniques, questioning the full utility of theoretical knowledge without practical application.

Representatives from Estonia, Latvia, Denmark, and Austria reiterated the relevance of practical CPR training, while simultaneously emphasising the importance of foundational knowledge regarding the mechanics of CPR and the operation of defibrillators.

Their countries offer varying models: Estonia mandates a 16-hour first aid course for Category B licences, Latvia is transitioning from general first aid certification to mandatory Basic Life Support (BLS) training, Denmark has achieved approximately 81% adult CPR training through decades of mandatory initiatives, and Austria requires a standardised 6-hour first aid course across all states. These approaches highlight the value of combining theoretical understanding with hands-on practice to ensure effective skill retention and public confidence in life-saving interventions.

Fragmentation in first aid training hinders standardised skill retention across Europe

A recurring issue identified during the discussion was the fragmentation of first aid training curricula across Europe, underscoring the critical need for increased cross-border collaboration. In this context, the Slovenian Red Cross representative presented their recently published first aid booklet, highlighting the extensive interministerial collaboration required for its creation. This collaborative effort involved the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Defence (which includes the Ministry of Transport), the Administration of Civil Protection and Disaster Relief, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs.



Hungarian and Serbian National Resuscitation Councils endorsed this position by emphasising both the need for more collaboration and a harmonised approach to training on a European level, identifying the minimum requirements.

AED awareness must be part of the first aid course

The Serbian National Resuscitation Council called for AED training to be integrated into BLS courses. The UK National Resuscitation Council supported this position, indicating that they include AED training in their CPR awareness campaigns. Confidence in performing CPR and using AEDs, however, remains generally low.

The Bulgarian Ministry of Transport and Communications inquired after guidelines for effective public AED use, particularly in contexts where formal training is not mandatory. The UK experience offers useful insights, such as providing legal protection for individuals who intervene with an AED, making education easily accessible, and empowering the public to act. Evidence shows that these measures significantly reduce apprehension and increase willingness to use an AED.

Bystanders should be empowered to initiate immediate AED intervention under the guidance of emergency call operators until professional help arrives. To support this, the creation and dissemination of concise, evidence-based digital resources, such as the two-minute socially primed videos evaluated in Scotland, represent a best practice.