

## When It's Time for Elderly Boston Residents to Stop Driving

Lately, the topic of elderly drivers has been in the news because of an event “across the pond.”

The 97-year-old husband of Queen Elizabeth II, Prince Philip, has announced that he's going to stop driving, as the [Boston Herald reported](#). That decision came after Philip was involved in a car accident where he smashed his Land Rover into another vehicle.

Fortunately, no one was seriously hurt in that crash, but other accident victims were not so lucky. In November, an 84-year-old driver going the wrong way on I-495 died in a multi-vehicle crash that also injured five other people, according to the [Boston Globe](#). In January, a car accident in Sharon caused the death of an elderly Rockport woman and her dog, [according to WHDH](#). Both drivers involved in that accident were over 70 years old.

This is a serious concern, and it's not going away. According to the [United States Census Bureau](#), there are over 75,000 people age 65 or over living in Boston. As the population continues to age, more and more people are going to need to have conversations with their parents and grandparents about when it's time to hang up their car keys for good.

### Risks associated with elderly drivers

As people's bodies slow down with age, safely operating a vehicle can become more difficult. Some age-related hazards that can make driving more dangerous include:

- **Poor eyesight and hearing.** Elderly people may not be able to see as well, even with corrective lenses. That's particularly problematic at night or during inclement weather, like rain or snow. Hearing loss, too, can make it harder to respond to hazards.
- **Slower reactions:** Especially in a major city like Boston or on busy highways like I-90, I-95 and I-495, drivers need to be able to react quickly to changing conditions and unexpected hazards.
- **Cognitive decline:** Unfortunately, some elderly people experience problems with memory or processing information. Sometimes, this can result in collisions when a driver mistakes the gas pedal for the brake or makes a poor decision behind the wheel.

It's also worth noting that when elderly drivers are involved in crashes, they are particularly susceptible to injuries such as broken bones, as well as complications like infections. As such, the risk of a serious or fatal injury is increased even more.

### Laws in Massachusetts pertaining to elderly drivers

There is no maximum age to be a licensed driver in Massachusetts, but the law does include several provisions intended to reduce the risks of elderly driving. These include:

- Drivers who are age 75 or older must renew their licenses in person at an RMV location. [MGL c.90, s.8](#)

- Massachusetts has a Medical Advisory Board that can provide advisory opinions on whether elderly or disabled drivers can safely be on the road. [MGL c.90, s.8C](#)
- Health care providers and law enforcement officers in Massachusetts are permitted to report "cognitive or functional impairment or incapability to operate motor vehicle safely" to the RMV. [MGL c.90, s.22I](#)

In addition, the law more generally requires motorists to make safe driving decisions in order to avoid causing crashes, which include the decision to get behind the wheel at all. Negligent drivers can be charged with traffic offenses, such as reckless driving or driving too fast for the conditions. They can also be held liable for damages caused in a civil lawsuit.

### **Having the conversation about getting off the road**

Older people have completely understandable concerns about giving up driving. They may be worried about losing their independence or missing out on their remaining time with friends and family because it's harder to get around. While those concerns are absolutely important, safety always comes first.

That means it's important to talk to elderly loved ones about whether they can still drive safely. Not every elderly person needs to stop driving, but families do need to discuss whether they can still safely drive at night, in inclement weather or on the highway. Many older people voluntarily limit their driving to daylight conditions on local roads where they know they can be safe and get a ride or use public transportation if they need to travel further. In other circumstances – for example, if there is significant vision loss or cognitive decline – they need to stop driving entirely.

It's important to discuss ways to preserve an elderly person's independence when he or she stops driving. Family members and friends can help by offering to drive, paying for public transportation (which can be a significant expense for someone on a fixed income), moving family gatherings and events closer to the elderly person's home, or using technology to keep elderly loved ones involved in events even when they can't be physically present.

We understand that aging comes with many hard choices, and we have sincere sympathy for older drivers who are struggling with these choices. At the end of the day, though, elderly people, like every other driver, have a responsibility to themselves and their communities to put safety first. That means making safe decisions – including staying home or getting a ride when they can no longer be safe behind the wheel.

If you or a loved one has been injured in a crash caused by an elderly driver, the [Law Offices of Mark E. Salomone](#) can help. We have a proven track record of successful advocacy for victims, with **over \$500 million recovered** in awards, verdicts, settlements and benefits. Contact us today to schedule a consultation at our Boston office or one of our 10 other locations throughout Massachusetts.