

Seatbelt buckle cover – prescribed device exemption

Background

Seatbelt buckle covers are accessories fitted to motor vehicle seatbelt buckles that prevents the user from releasing the seatbelt. These devices are usually prescribed by health practitioners in response to vehicle passengers (usually children) with a medical condition or disability who habitually unbuckle their seatbelt whilst the vehicle is moving.

The use of seatbelt buckle covers can cause conflict with vehicle standards for seatbelts that requires “easy release” of the seatbelt by the user. This applies to vehicles manufactured to comply with the Australian Design Rules for seatbelts – versions 04/04, 04/05 and 04/06.

Some facts

On 16 March 2022, an exemption was issued to allow the use of a prescribed device – i.e. seatbelt buckle covers or other similar seatbelt accessories.

The exemption authorises the legal use of a prescribed device for children and adults subject to specific conditions of the exemption.

The exemption applies to a class of vehicles where:

- a) a seatbelt is fitted with a prescribed device
- b) an “Advice to Parents” form or medical certificate is in the vehicle
- c) instructions for the prescribed device is in the vehicle
- d) the passenger - to whom an “Advice to Parents” form or medical certificate has been issued - is using the seatbelt with the prescribed device.

The exemption does not apply to a prescribed device fitted to a child restraint seatbelt buckle.

The department has worked closely with Mobility and Accessibility for Children in Australia Ltd (MACA) to develop the exemption.

What you should do

Persons responsible for a child or adult client (i.e. parent, carer) must consult a “Medical Practitioner” or “Prescriber” to assess the circumstances of the client for their motor vehicle transport needs:

1. For a child under 16 years, an assessment in accordance with the *Australian/New Zealand Standard (AS/NZS) 4370-2013 ‘Restraint of children with disabilities or medical conditions in motor vehicles’* requires the “Prescriber” to issue an “Advice to Parents” form.
2. For an adult, from an assessment by a ‘Medical Practitioner’, a medical certificate may be issued for the client to provide a medical solution for the transport task.

A completed “Advice to Parents” form or a medical certificate must be retained by the driver of the vehicle along with instructions for the use of the prescribed device (i.e. seatbelt buckle cover).

If the instructions require a seatbelt cutter for use in emergency situations, the driver must comply with this condition.

A copy of the “Advice to Parents” form or medical certificate must be presented by the driver to a requesting enforcement officer (i.e. Police).

For the purpose of the exemption:

Medical Practitioner means a person registered under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law to practise in the medical profession (other than as a student).

Prescriber means a Medical Practitioner, occupational therapist, psychologist, physiotherapist, rehabilitation engineer, or biomedical engineer.

Medical Certificate means a medical certificate completed and signed by a Medical Practitioner, and issued for a person named in the certificate, stating that the person named in the certificate has a medical condition or disability which makes it unsuitable for the person to be able to release themselves from a seatbelt buckle worn by the person with a single simple movement of one hand in one direction, but excluding any certificate which has expired, as specified in the certificate.

Prescribed Device means a device designed for, and is suitable for use by, a person with a medical condition or disability, which prevents the seatbelt buckle from being released by the wearer with a single simple movement of one hand in one direction.

More information

- Northern Territory Gazette - Prescribed Device Exemption - G11, 16 March 2022 - [Government Gazettes - NT.GOV.AU](#)
- Mobility and Accessibility for Children in Australia Ltd (MACA) - www.macahub.org
- Road Safety - [Road safety, rules and conditions - NT.GOV.AU](#)