

Resuscitation Council UK (RCUK) briefing: Automated external defibrillators (AEDs) in vehicles

Background

More than [40,000 people](#) in the UK each year experience an out-of-hospital cardiac arrest (OHCA) where ambulance services attempt resuscitation, and survival depends on immediate CPR and rapid defibrillation. While public access defibrillators (PADs) are increasingly available, questions sometimes arise about whether individuals should carry automated external defibrillators (AEDs) in private vehicles.

There is **no UK legislation requiring motorists to carry an AED**, and RCUK does **not** advocate for mandatory carriage. Under common law, anyone is legally protected to use an AED in an emergency, and devices are designed for safe use by untrained responders.

[Recent work](#) with the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) has strengthened the link between motorists and emergency response. From early 2026, **questions on CPR and defibrillator awareness will be included in the car and motorcycle theory test**, following a partnership between DVSA, RCUK and national Save a Life programmes. With around **2.4 million learner drivers** taking the test each year, this update ensures new drivers gain essential lifesaving knowledge.

RCUK position

RCUK's priority is the widespread availability of public access defibrillators (PADs) in fixed, known locations, registered on the national defibrillator network [The Circuit](#), where they can be used by anyone in an emergency. This model supports community readiness, equitable access and integration with The Circuit.

Some individuals choose to carry an AED in their vehicle — for example, community responders, rural motorists or professional drivers who spend long periods on the road. In these cases, an AED may offer additional reassurance or the potential to shorten time to first shock.

RCUK do not currently agree with an immediate focus on equipping every new car with a defibrillator. Further data is required to ascertain how this would support reducing inequalities in resuscitation. RCUK are also concerned with regards to how this would be implemented in a way that ensures defibrillators are always rescue ready.

Why some individuals choose to carry AEDs

Voluntary carriage may be helpful in certain contexts:

- Drivers may be first on scene at roadside incidents or in rural areas where ambulance response times may be longer.
- Shortening time to first shock can significantly improve survival chances.
- Complementing CPR training — individuals who are already trained or engaged in community response may feel confident carrying a device.

- Police vehicles often carry AEDs as police officers are often the first responders on the scene of medical emergencies.

This remains a personal decision based on individual circumstances.

Practical considerations for storage in vehicles

For individuals who choose to carry an AED, several factors must be considered:

- **Temperature sensitivity** AEDs have specific storage temperature ranges. Heat inside parked vehicles can exceed safe limits, and cold weather may require insulated cases.
- **Accessibility** AEDs should be stored in a location that is easy to reach quickly and not obstructed by luggage or equipment.
- **Security** AEDs should be kept out of sight when the vehicle is unattended to reduce theft risk.
- **Maintenance** Owners must check battery and pad expiry dates and ensure the device's status indicator shows it is rescue-ready.
- **Registration** AEDs should be registered on **The Circuit** so emergency services can locate them if needed.

Relevant RCUK resources

You can access more information here:

- [Guidance on defibrillators](#)
- [CPR and defibrillation learning for drivers](#)

About us

Resuscitation Council UK (RCUK) is the national charity responsible for setting resuscitation guidelines, promoting high-quality CPR and defibrillation training, and improving survival from cardiac arrest across all four nations of the UK. We work with healthcare professionals, policymakers, emergency services and the public to strengthen the chain of survival and ensure that more people have the confidence and skills to act in an emergency.