Letter to the Editor

COVID-19 pandemic, driving test and road safety during outbreak

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Dear Editor,

We would like to share our ideas regarding the publication entitled "Exemption of behind-the-wheel driving test for novice young drivers: A serious public health concern (Bari et al, 2020)." Bari et al. (2020) stated that "*While the decision was made to address the backlog of driving tests created by the COVID-19 pandemic, and also to practice social distancing (Taylor, 2020), many public health experts are now concerned that this decision will have catastrophic consequences on road safety.*" Research suggests that a driving test that monitors both driver performance and behavior (Lee, 2008) is a good test and one that advances road safety. Whether a driving test can be exempted in some special circumstances is an interesting question.

Wiberg (2006) found that there is no gender difference in practical test performance among those male and female individuals who take their driver's license test. However, Wiberg (2006) did find female test-takers performed better than their male counterparts on the theoretical part of the test. Presently, driving test are mandatory for anyone wanting a driver's license, without any exemptions. Health screening is also recommended for diseases such as eye disorders and neuropsychiatric problems.

During the COVID-19 outbreak, because of social distancing public health requirements, driving tests had to be postponed. Nevertheless driver license testing is necessary. Hence, there needs to be solution to overcome the present COVID-19 outbreak problem. One possible solution is to carry out the test using a closed-circuit television (CCTV) camera system for monitoring the driver from a remote safe distance. Approved CCTV technology can be effective in road safety applications as well as in training and licensing drivers (Satiennam et al., 2020).

We agree with Bari et al. (2020), that a lack of testing might increase the risk of traffic incidences for inexperienced young drivers. Prevention of deaths and serious injuries is important, as is preventing COVID-19-related deaths via social distancing. Basic safety control measures, such as alcohol breath testing, have been still possible during the COVID-19 pandemic if appropriate personal protection equipment (PPE) are used, such as face shields, masks and for example by using an extension breathing tube for an alcohol breath test (Mungmunpuntipantip and Wiwanitkit, 2020). It simply requires a appropriate planning and adaptation for maintaining social distancing (Mungmunpuntipantip and Wiwanitkit, 2020) and/or anti-viral protection procedures currently being carried out in COVID-19 testing stations and hospitals.

Traffic safety during the present COVID-outbreak is important. Use of safety protective equipment such as helmets and seatbelts, maintaining legal regulations such as speed control and alcohol breath testing, and driver licensing tests, are all still necessary and required. Furthermore, adolescent driving behavior has not changed post COVID-19 outbreak (Stavrinos et al. 2020) although

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there appears to be a decreased number of crash incidents (Morris et al., 2020). However, Inada et al. (2021) found that empty roads in Japan during lockdown triggered an increase in speed-related traffic violations causing fatal motor vehicle collisions. Another interesting example is a case study presented by Fernandes (2021) of a motorcycle rider who wore a simple helmet that covered only his head but not his face. At the time of the incident he was wearing a loose facemask while riding. His facemask slipped upwards in the wind blinding him and he subsequently fell seriously injuring his leg.

Hence, appropriate guidelines for the simultaneous use of traffic safety technologies and infection prevention PPE against COVID-19, along with appropriate public health educational and training programs for safe driving/riding, should be developed and are necessary.

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