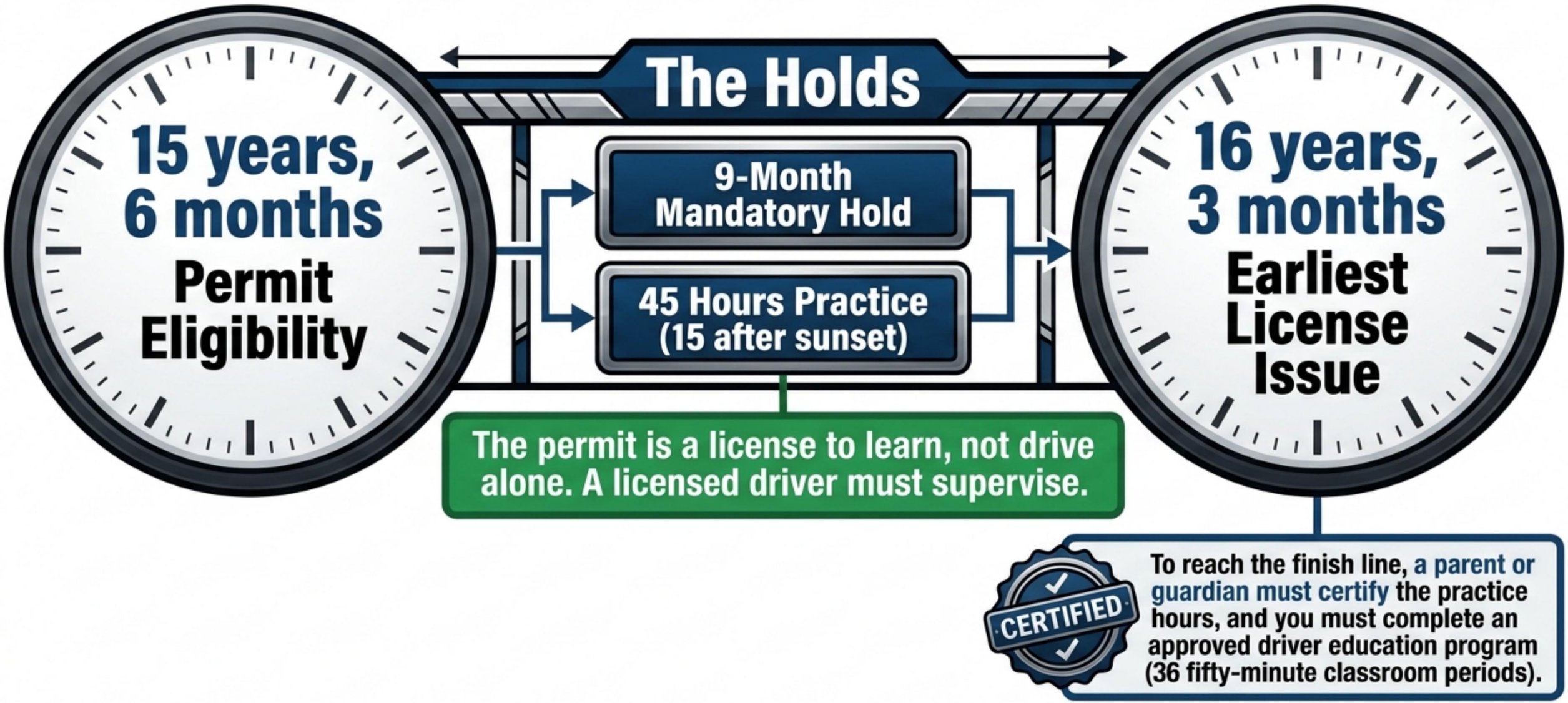
The Virginia Driving Playbook: Gates, Ladders, and Traps

Everything you need to crack the DMV knowledge test—decoded, simplified, and verified.

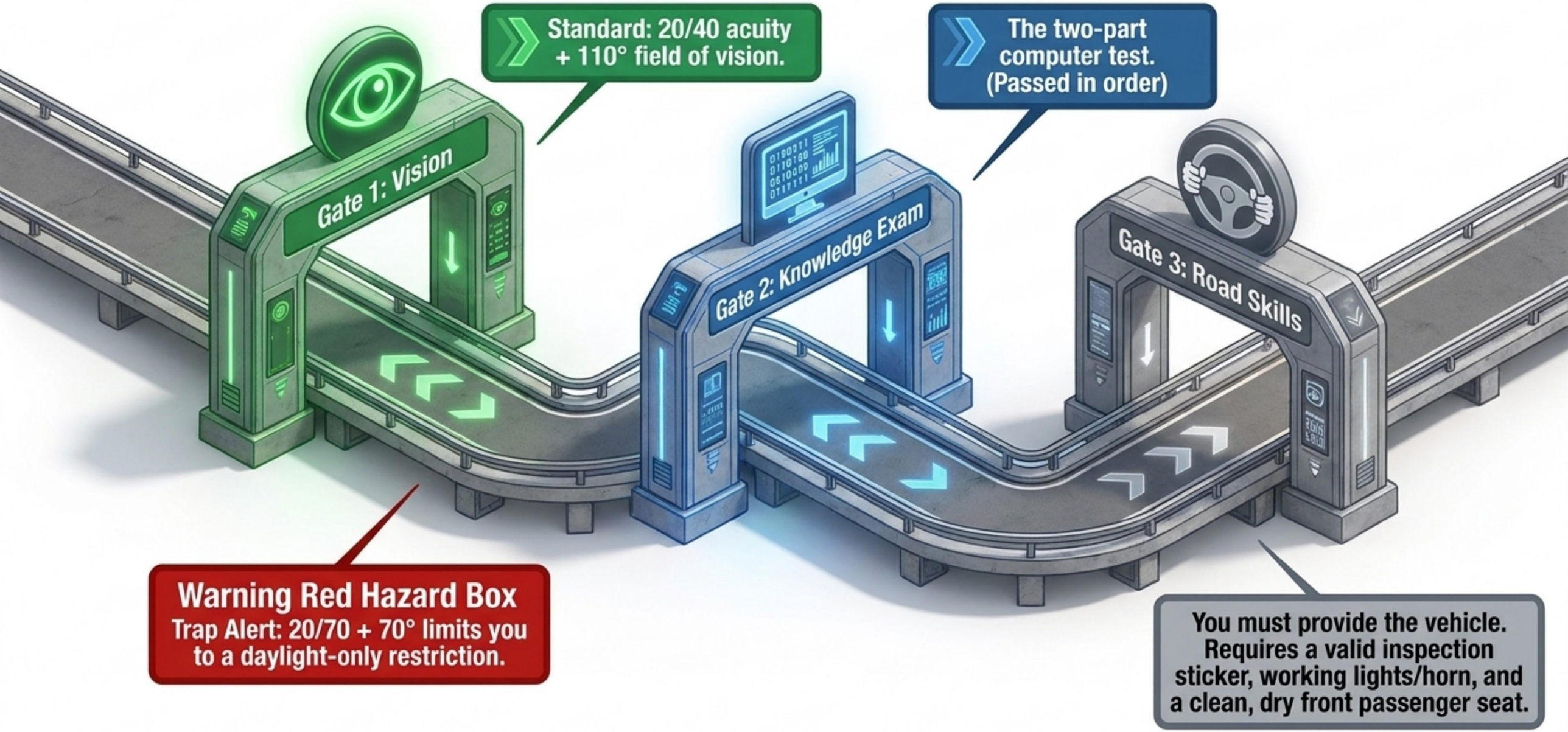


Virginia driving is a game of two halves: Passing the **Gates** to get your license, and climbing the **Ladders** to keep it.

The journey to a license runs on strict math.



Every applicant faces the exact same three gates at the DMV counter.



The Knowledge Exam unlocks in two strict phases.



Part 1

Part 2

Part 1 (Traffic Signs)
10 questions. 100% required. No partial credit. You must answer all 10 correctly to continue.

Part 2 (General Knowledge)
— 30 questions, 80% required, you must answer at least 24 of 30 correctly to pass.

Warning Red Hazard Box
Trap Alert: Some older guides claim Virginia does not publish a Part Two question count. That is out of date — the DMV publishes it: 30 questions, 24 to pass.

Ten signs, all ten. Then knowledge at eighty.

Failing the knowledge exam changes the rules of the timeline.



The Three-Strike Rule

Fail the exam three times? You must complete the classroom component of driver education (36 fifty-minute periods) before testing again. (Applicants 18+ have the option of an 8-hour manual-based course).

The cost of the privilege and the card you carry.

DMV FEE SCHEDULE

Learner’s Permit: **$3**

Driver’s License: **$4** for each year of validity (e.g., $32 for 8 years)

Replacement License: **$20**

Replacement Permit: **$2**

REAL ID Add-on: **$10** (one-time fee)



Card Anatomy by Law: Licenses issued to persons under 21 are printed in a vertical format so they are recognizable at a glance.

A new license under 18 carries training wheels written into law

Curfew

No driving from Midnight to 4 a.m.

Passenger Limits

Year 1: Strictly 1 passenger under 21.

After Year 1 (until 18): 3 passengers under 21.

(Family members excepted)

Device Ban

Total ban on cell phone use while driving. Hands-free is illegal for teens. (Only emergency exceptions).

The DMV point system runs in two directions at once.

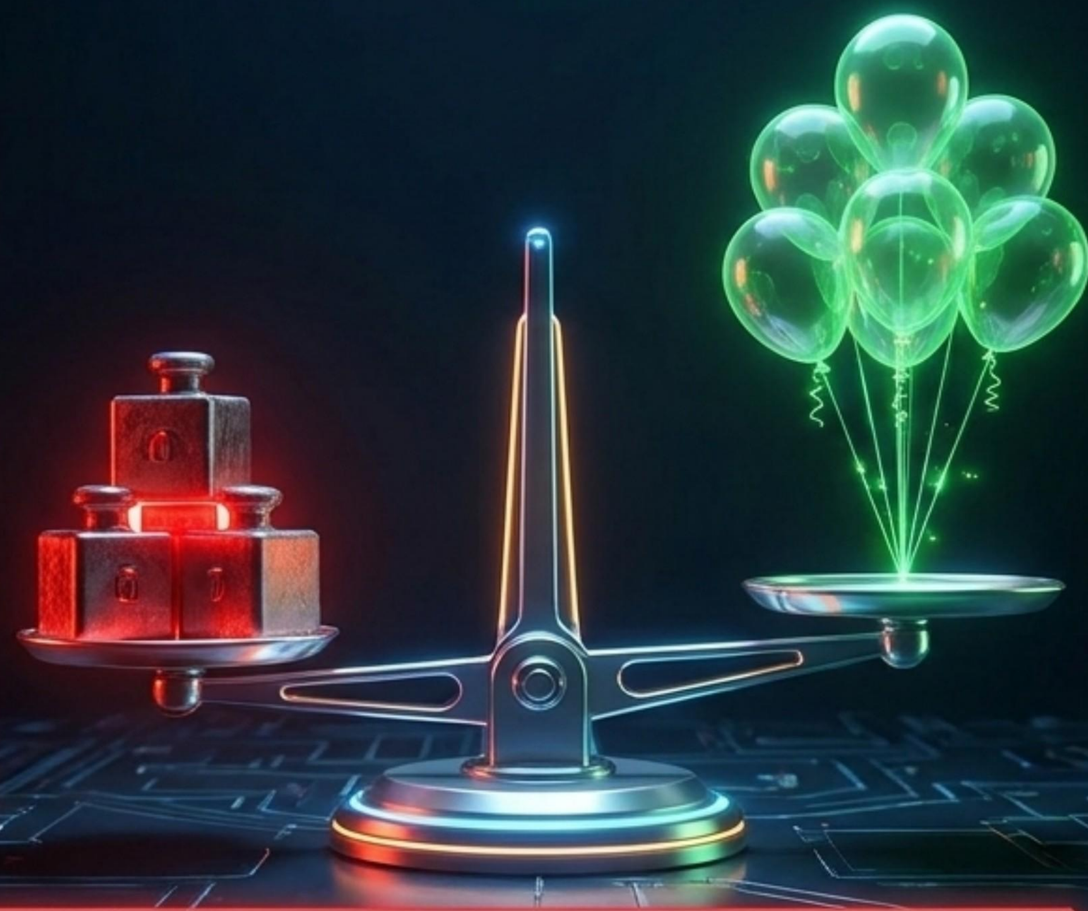
The Downward Pull (Demerits)

Valid for 2 years.

6 Points: DUI, manslaughter, reckless driving (speed or passing stopped school bus).

4 Points: 10–19 mph over limit, failure to yield.

3 Points: 1–9 mph over limit, handheld device conviction.



The Upward Lift (Safe Points)

Earn +1 point per clean calendar year (Max balance: +5).

A voluntary driver clinic earns +5 points (once every 24 months).

Warning Red Hazard Box:
Trap Alert: Two offenses from a single occasion? DMV only assigns points for the single highest value one.

Point consequences hit differently depending on your age.

The Adult Ladder (in 12 months)



The Under-18 Ladder



Demerits: three, four, six. Safe points climb to five.
Adults: eight warns, twelve clinics, eighteen suspends.

Losing the privilege: Suspension vs. Revocation

PAUSED: Suspension

A temporary withdrawal of your privilege.

- Triggers include DUI, refusing a chemical test.
- Administrative Trap: DMV also suspends for child-support noncompliance when payments are 90 days late or $5,000 in arrears.

ACCOUNT DELETED: Revocation

The privilege is completely terminated.

- You cannot simply get the card back.
- You must re-apply, pass the vision screening, pass the two-part knowledge exam, and pass the road skills test to ever drive again.

Liability insurance minimums changed permanently on January 1, 2025.

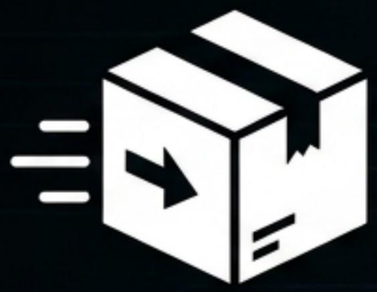
~~30/60/20~~ 50/100/25

$50,000	$100,000	$25,000
Injury or death of **one person**	Injury or death of **two or more people**	Property damage

The Uninsured Penalty:
License/registration suspension + $600 statutory fee + 3 years of SR-22 filings.

Trap Alert: Older tests will offer 30/60/20 or a $500 fee. These are dead numbers eliminated in 2024. Choose them and you fail.

Keeping your paperwork and your vehicle legal.



30

New Residents: Must title and register vehicles in Virginia within 30 days of moving.



2

License Plates: Virginia law mandates plates displayed on the front AND rear of the vehicle.



1

Safety Inspection: Registered vehicles must pass a Virginia safety inspection every year.



30

Address Changes: You must notify the DMV of a new address within 30 days.

The 3-Question Self-Check

1. Describe the two parts of the knowledge exam and their pass standards. What is the under-18 penalty for failing?

2. What are the exact passenger limits for a provisionally licensed driver under 18?

3. What are the current minimum liability insurance limits, and what is the statutory fee for driving uninsured?

Answer Key & Final Data Log

- 1. Part 1 (Signs): 10/10. Part 2 (General): 80%. Under-18 fail penalty: Wait 15 days.
- 2. Year 1: one passenger under 21. After Year 1: three passengers under 21.
- 3. Limits: 50/100/25. Uninsured fee: $600.

Permit	15y6m | $3 | 9-month hold | 45 hrs (15 sunset)
First License	16y3m
Driver Ed	36 periods
Vision	20/40 + 110°
Fees	License $4/year | REAL ID +$10 | Replacements $20 / $2
Points	Demerits 3/4/6 (2 yrs) | Safe +5 | Adult ladder 8/12/18

Keep practicing — free, no sign-up

Virginia Licensing & Registration study guide, practice tests & flashcards:

drivinglicensetest.org/va