

GENERIC · POWERTRAIN

P263A

OBD-II DIAGNOSTIC TROUBLE CODE (DTC)

P263A

MIL Control Circuit Low

P263A indicates that the powertrain control module (PCM) has detected a low-voltage condition on the circuit that controls the malfunction indicator lamp (MIL), which is the check engine light on the dashboard. The PCM monitors this circuit and expects to see voltage within a specific range when the lamp is commanded off; a low voltage suggests a short to ground or an open circuit in the control wire or the lamp itself.

SYSTEM	CODE TYPE	SEVERITY	FIX DIFFICULTY	AREA
Powertrain	Generic (all makes)	Medium	Professional	Computer and output circuits

Symptoms you may notice

- The check engine light may not illuminate when the ignition is turned on, failing the bulb check.
- The check engine light may remain off even when other fault codes are stored that should trigger it.
- Often no symptoms besides the warning light itself, as the MIL circuit does not affect engine performance.
- In some vehicles, a message may appear on the driver information center indicating a lamp circuit fault.
- If the MIL is inoperative, the driver may be unaware of other emissions-related problems.
- The vehicle may fail an emissions inspection due to the MIL not functioning properly.

Common causes, most likely first

- A short to ground in the control wire between the PCM and the MIL.
- An open circuit in the control wire or a poor connection at the PCM or instrument cluster.
- A faulty instrument cluster or printed circuit board affecting the MIL circuit.
- A defective PCM driver for the MIL control circuit.
- Corrosion or water intrusion in the wiring harness or connectors.
- Aftermarket accessories or alarm systems improperly tapped into the MIL circuit.



How to diagnose and fix it

- 1 Verify the MIL operation during the bulb check with the ignition on and engine off; if it does not illuminate, proceed with circuit diagnosis.
- 2 Check for technical service bulletins (TSBs) and wiring diagrams specific to the vehicle to understand the MIL circuit configuration.
- 3 Inspect the wiring harness and connectors between the PCM and the instrument cluster for damage, corrosion, or loose pins.
- 4 Measure resistance and voltage on the MIL control circuit to identify shorts to ground or opens, using a digital multimeter.
- 5 Test the instrument cluster by substituting a known-good unit or performing a cluster self-test if applicable.
- 6 If the circuit and cluster are good, test the PCM by checking its output on the MIL control circuit with a scan tool or oscilloscope.
- 7 Repair or replace the faulty component (wire, connector, cluster, or PCM) and clear the code to verify the repair.

Why the MIL Circuit Needs Careful Testing

- A P263A code often sets because the PCM detects low voltage on the MIL control circuit when the lamp is commanded off, which can be caused by a short to ground that may also affect other circuits in the same harness.
- The MIL circuit is monitored by the PCM even when the lamp is off, so a short to ground can set this code without any visible symptom until the PCM tries to turn the lamp on.
- Some vehicles use a smart junction box or body control module (BCM) to control the MIL, so the fault may lie in a module other than the PCM, requiring module-specific diagnostics.
- Aftermarket remote starters or alarm systems that tap into the instrument cluster wiring are a common cause of MIL circuit faults that are overlooked during diagnosis.
- A failed instrument cluster voltage regulator or a bad ground at the cluster can mimic a MIL circuit fault, so always check powers and grounds at the cluster before replacing the PCM.

Can I keep driving with P263A?

The vehicle is generally safe to drive because the MIL circuit does not affect engine operation, but you should avoid ignoring the issue since the check engine light may not illuminate for other serious faults. Have the circuit diagnosed soon to ensure the MIL functions properly for emissions compliance and safety warnings.



Tools that help

- OBD-II scan tool with bidirectional control capability
- Digital multimeter (DMM)
- Wiring diagrams and service information
- Test light or logic probe
- Oscilloscope (optional for advanced diagnosis)

Reading P263A

- P** Powertrain: engine, transmission and emissions.
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- 2** Generic (SAE) code: it means the same thing on every OBD-II vehicle.
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- 6** Computer and output circuits.
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- 3A** The exact fault within that area.

Often seen with

P0650 Malfunction Indicator Lamp (MIL) Control Circuit Malfunction · **P0651** Sensor Reference Voltage 'B' Circuit/Open · **P0652** Sensor Reference Voltage 'B' Circuit Low · **P0653** Sensor Reference Voltage 'B' Circuit High · **P263B** MIL Control Circuit High

See it working

Watch the animated explainer **Four-Stroke Engine Cutaway: Intake to Exhaust** on Auto Veteran to see the parts involved moving.

Full guide, related articles and animations: <https://www.autoveteran.tech/dtc-codes/p263a/>

