

# Replace Your Vital Records

Find out how to replace vital documents, such as birth certificates, Social Security cards, and more.

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## Replace Lost or Stolen Identification (ID) Cards

Identification (ID) cards help you prove who you are, where you live or work, and what benefits you're entitled to.

**Tip:** To get any type of replacement ID card, you may need to show or mail in other official documents (like a birth certificate) to prove who you are. Check the agency's website to find out what documents you'll need to bring or mail. Find out if they can be copies or if they need to be original documents.

**Tip:** Depending on where you live, you may have the option to apply online for replacement cards. Some states and some types of cards may require you to get replacement cards in person or by mail.

### 1. Replace Your Driver's License or State-Issued ID Card

[Contact your state motor vehicle agency](#) for a replacement license or state ID card.

### 2. Replace Your Social Security Card

[Contact the Social Security Administration \(SSA\)](#) to request a replacement card.

### 3. Replace Your Medicare ID Card

[Get in touch with the Medicare program](#) to replace your lost or stolen Medicare card.

### 4. Replace Your Medicaid ID Card

[Contact your state Medicaid office](#) to get a replacement Medicaid card.

## 5. Replace Your U.S. Passport

Let the State Department know immediately about your lost or stolen passport and then request a replacement.

## 6. Replace Your Permanent Resident (Green) Card

Apply through the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) for a replacement Permanent Resident Card (Green Card).

## 7. Replace Your Federal Employee or Contractor ID Card

Notify your supervisor, your agency's security office, and the IT service desk if your federal employee or contractor ID was lost or stolen.

## 8. Replace Your U.S. Military ID Cards

Report the missing card to your base security officer. Then use the Real Time Automated Personnel Identification System (RAPIDS) to get a replacement.

## Vital Records Issued in the United States

Vital records consist of birth, death, marriage, and divorce certificates. State government vital records offices issue these documents. To get a copy of a vital record, contact the vital records office in the state where the event occurred.

## How to Replace Your Lost or Destroyed Vital Records After a Disaster

Replacing all important documents that were lost or destroyed in a flood, fire, or other disaster can be overwhelming. Although the process varies from state to state, these general steps can help you get started.

### 1. Make Other Arrangements for Mail Delivery If Your Home Was Destroyed

Government agencies usually mail replacement vital documents to your home.

- If you lost your home, contact your local post office. Ask if you can pick up your mail there or request to have your mail forwarded to a temporary location.

### 2. Replace Your U.S. Birth Certificate

Find the vital records office in the state where you were born. Check to see if you can get a certified copy of your birth certificate with no identification. If you can, follow the ordering instructions.

- Some states accept alternate ways to verify your ID. You may have to contact your state to find out what it requires. For example:
  - A state may accept your sworn statement of identity.
  - Another state may accept a notarized letter from your mother or father whose name is on your birth certificate, along with a copy of their photo ID.
- If you do need your own government-issued photo ID to get a copy of your birth certificate, start with step 3.

### 3. Replace Your Driver's License

Get this first if you can't get your birth certificate.

- Check with your state for its procedures. In some states, you can order a replacement online without providing any ID.

### 4. Replace Your Green Card

If you are a lawful permanent resident of the U.S., apply for a replacement permanent resident card.

### 5. Replace Your Naturalization or Citizenship Documents

- If you are a naturalized U.S. citizen, follow the steps to replace your naturalization or citizenship papers.
- If you don't have a copy of your original documents to submit with your application, contact the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

### 6. Replace Your Marriage Certificate

You'll need a certified copy as proof if you changed your name when you got married.

- Contact the vital records office in the state where you were married.

### 7. Replace Your Social Security Card

- First, find out if you need a replacement card. Most of the time, you'll just need to know your number and not show your card.
- If you do need a card, follow the steps to replace your Social Security card.

### 8. Report Your Lost or Destroyed U.S. Passport and Apply for a Replacement

- Report a lost or destroyed passport to the State Department immediately.
- Fill out a form DS-11 to apply for a new passport.
- Depending on when you're traveling, bring it to either a passport acceptance facility or a passport agency or center.
  - Bring a certified copy of your birth certificate or naturalization papers and a government-issued photo ID.

### 9. Replace Other Important Documents

- Replace your voter registration card through your [state or local election office](#).
- Learn how to [replace other documents](#) including Medicare and Medicaid cards and military and federal employee IDs.

## Get a Copy of Your Birth Certificate

As a U.S. citizen, your birth certificate may be your most important document. It proves your identity and age. You'll need it to:

- Apply for a passport or government benefits
- Enroll in school
- Join the military
- Claim pension or insurance benefits

If you need a copy, where you were born will determine how to get it.

### Birth Certificate Copies: Born in the U.S.

Contact the [vital records office](#) in the state where you were born to get a copy of your birth certificate. Follow the instructions for requesting copies and paying fees. If you need a copy fast, ask about expedited service or shipping when you place your order.

### Birth Certificate Copies: Americans Born Abroad

If you were born to American parents abroad, they should have registered your birth with the country's [U.S. embassy or consulate](#). If they did, they would have received a Consular Report of Birth Abroad. You can [get a copy of this report](#) from the U.S. Department of State. Depending on the country, a vital records office in the nation may also list the birth.

If you were born on a [military base](#) abroad, your parents may not have registered your birth with the U.S. embassy. In that case, you may have to contact the hospital where you were born. You can also try contacting the base operator or [the public affairs office for the appropriate military branch](#).

### Birth Certificate Copies: Born Abroad and Adopted by U.S. Parents

A child born in a foreign country and adopted by a U.S. citizen will not receive a U.S. birth certificate. The country in which you were born will have issued it. To get a copy, [contact the nearest foreign embassy or consulate](#) for that country. If you need an authenticated copy and it's not in English, ask the embassy for help to get it translated.

If you were adopted from another country by a U.S. citizen, you should have copies of your naturalization/citizenship papers. If you don't, submit an [application for replacement of naturalization/citizenship form](#). For help, contact [U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services](#).

## Request a Replacement Marriage Certificate

People often confuse a marriage license with a marriage certificate. It's usually the certificate, which proves two people are married, that you'll need.

## **Marriage Licenses and Marriage Certificates**

A marriage license is the piece of paper that authorizes you to get married. A marriage certificate is the document that proves you are married. Typically, after the ceremony, you, your spouse, and witnesses will sign the license. The person who performs your wedding ceremony will sign the license and submit it to a county office. The county will issue your marriage certificate usually within a month.

### **Get a New or Duplicate Marriage License**

Most marriage licenses expire within 30 days to a year, depending on the issuing state. If your license expires before you get married, you can apply for a new one. If your license is lost or destroyed after the wedding, before it's submitted to the county, the person who officiated must take action. They should contact the office that issued your license to get a duplicate.

### **Get a Copy of Your Marriage Certificate**

For a certified copy of your marriage certificate, contact the [vital records office](#) in the state where you were married. You'll find instructions on how to request a copy and information on any fees.

Even though the guidelines vary by state, all requests should include:

- Full names of both spouses at the time of marriage
- Month, day, and year of the marriage
- Place of the marriage (city or town, county, and state)
- Purpose for requesting the copy of the marriage certificate
- Relationship to the people whose marriage certificate is being requested
- Your daytime telephone number (include area code)

## **Request a Certified Copy of a Death Certificate**

You may need to provide a copy of the death certificate of a spouse or other family member for a variety of legal reasons.

### **Tasks Requiring a Death Certificate**

You may need a copy of the death certificate to:

- Claim life insurance
- Apply for a spouse's pension and/or Social Security benefits
- Apply for Medicaid benefits
- Change joint bank and credit card accounts, utilities, mortgages, vehicle titles, and leases
- Remarry

Check to see which require a certified copy of the death certificate and which require just a photocopy.

## **Requesting a Death Certificate for a Death in the U.S.**

You can request a certified copy of a death certificate from the [vital records](#) office of the state or territory in which the death occurred. See the instructions for that state or territory for details such as:

- Fees
- Address to write to
- The requestor's required identification

In addition to your state's requirements, all requests should contain:

- Full name of the person whose death certificate is being requested
- Their sex
- Their parents' names, including maiden name of their mother
- Month, day, and year of their death
- Place of death (city or town, county, and state; and name of hospital, if known/applicable)
- Purpose for which the copy is needed
- Your relationship to the person whose record is being requested
- Your daytime telephone number with area code

## **Requesting a Death Certificate for a Death Outside the U.S.**

You will need to obtain a copy of the U.S. embassy or consulate's report of the [death abroad](#) for U.S. legal proceedings. See [Death of an American Abroad](#) for details on obtaining a copy of this report.

## **Divorce Decrees and Certificates**

A divorce decree is an official document from the court that grants the termination of a marriage. It includes specific details of the divorce.

A divorce certificate is issued by a state vital records office. It shows that a divorce occurred but does not state all the same information as a divorce decree. You can save time and money by determining which document you need before requesting a copy.

### **U.S. Divorces**

#### **Get a Copy of a Divorce Decree**

Contact the "county clerk's office" or "clerk of the court" for the county or city in which the divorce was granted.

### **Get a Copy of a Divorce Certificate**

Contact the state vital records office in which the divorce was granted.

### **Overseas Divorces**

If the divorce occurred in another country and you're in the U.S., contact that country's embassy or nearest consulate. They can tell you how to get a copy of the divorce decree.

United States law does not require U.S. citizens to register a foreign divorce decree at an embassy. But if the country in which your divorce took place is a signatory to the Hague Convention on the Authentication of Documents, you may bring your divorce decree to a U.S. Embassy or consulate to have it certified.