

Passport Operations in Response to COVID-19

COVID-19 Alert
June 16, 2020

Update on U.S. Passport Operations

Safely Working For You

To prevent the spread of COVID-19 and protect our workforce and customers, we significantly reduced passport operations in March 2020. We temporarily suspended expedited passport processing and restricted service to cases involving life-or-death emergencies.

As global conditions evolve and U.S. states begin to reopen, we are resuming operations in phases. We ask for your patience as we safely work on your application.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the current status of passport operations?

On Thursday, June 11, various passport agencies and centers entered phase one of our reopening plan. Go to our [Passport Agency and Center](#) page for the latest information.

Passport agencies and centers are only open to assist customers who need a passport in the next 72 hours for a [life-or-death emergency](#). For the health and safety of employees and customers, we are minimizing the amount of time employees and customers spend together in our agencies and centers. Customers must make an appointment for life-or-death emergency service and cannot walk in to our agencies or centers.

2. What services can I expect in each phase of reopening?

The Department will resume processing passports in phases, while protecting the safety of both our staff and our customers.

Phase 1: Some of our employees will return to our agencies and centers, allowing us to resume limited processing of applications we already received. Applications will be processed on a first in, first out basis, beginning with the oldest applications received. We will continue to prioritize services for customers with life-or-death emergencies by appointment only. Customers must wear cloth face coverings in all common areas, including our lobbies, and observe strict social distancing. During phase one, we will continue to recommend customers wait to submit new or renewal applications as delays will continue.

Phase 2: Most staff will return to our agencies and centers, and we will be able to resume processing more of the applications we already received. Applications will be processed on a first in, first out basis, beginning with the oldest applications received. While we will continue

prioritizing life-or-death emergency cases, we will also offer more appointments at our agencies and centers. Services offered at our agencies will continue to be by appointment only. Staff and customers should wear cloth face coverings in all common areas, including our lobbies, and continue to observe social distancing. During phase two, we will continue to recommend customers wait to submit new or renewal applications as delays will continue.

Phase 3: All remaining staff return to our agencies and centers, and we plan to resume normal operations. We will offer a processing time commitment for routine service and resume expedited service in this phase. You should continue to make an appointment to apply at an agency or center. We will continue to address applications on a first in, first out basis, focusing on the oldest applications. Staff and customers may wear cloth face coverings in common areas and we will encourage social distancing.

3. Why can't employees work on passport applications from home?

Passport applications must be adjudicated in our agencies and centers to protect customers' personally identifiable information and ensure the integrity of the application process. We maintain the highest standards of security and privacy protection for our customers, and must secure sensitive documents like birth certificates and naturalization certificates in our offices. We must also physically print and mail passport books and cards back to customers from our facilities. We are preparing to have more employees return to our agencies and centers in phases, and will immediately work to finalize pending applications.

4. What qualifies as a life-or-death emergency?

[Life-or-death emergencies](#) are serious illnesses, injuries, or deaths in your immediate family (parent, child, spouse, sibling, and grandparent) that require you to travel outside the United States within 72 hours (3 days).

You must provide:

- A [passport application with supporting documents](#)
- Proof of the life-or-death emergency such as a death certificate, a statement from a mortuary, or a signed letter from a hospital or medical professional. Documents must be in English or translated in English.
- Proof of international travel (e.g. reservation, ticket, itinerary) specific to the emergency.

To make an appointment at a passport agency or center for a life-or-death emergency, you must call our National Passport Information Center at [1-877-487-2778](tel:1-877-487-2778) ([1-888-874-7793](tel:1-888-874-7793) TDD/TTY) on Monday- Friday, 8:00 am to 5:00 pm Eastern Time, except federal holidays. Call [202-647-4000](tel:202-647-4000) outside of these hours to make an appointment.

5. I already submitted an application. How long will it take for me to receive my passport and my citizenship evidence documents?

As additional employees return to our agencies and centers, we are working aggressively to address a high volume of pending applications from customers who applied before and after we limited passport operations in March. You will continue to experience delays in phase one and phase two. To see the current wait times to receive your passport and the return of your citizenship documents such as previous passports, and birth and naturalization certificates, please see our [Processing Times](#) page. Unfortunately, we are not able to return documents before the passport is completed. We ask for your patience as we safely work on your application.

6. Can I get a status update on my passport?

Due to the unprecedented impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, at this time we are not able to provide a specific update on when you will receive your passport and supporting documents. We will offer processing times when we reach phase three of our reopening plan.

If you call our [National Passport Information Center](#) or check our [Online Passport Status System](#) after you apply or renew, your application status may be "Not Found" or "In Process." "Not Found" means your application is in transit to one of our agencies and centers. "In Process" means your application is with the Department of State and we will review it as our staff return in phases to our agencies and centers.

7. Why did you cash my check if you are not updating my passport status?

One of the first steps in the process is handling passport fees. Although we can process fees remotely, we are not able to handle secure documents such as birth certificates at home. Your applications and documents with personally identifiable information are secure. We cannot further process these applications until our staff return to our passport agencies and centers.

8. Can I expedite my passport?

No. We suspended expedited service in March. You cannot upgrade your application to expedite service at this time. We do not plan to offer expedited service until we reach phase three of our reopening plan.

9. Can I apply now?

You can still apply now, but unless you have a life-or-death emergency, **you will experience delays before receiving your passport** and the return of your citizenship documents such as previous passports, and birth and naturalization certificates. We will not offer normal processing times until phase three of our reopening plan.

If you need to apply in person (all children under age 16 and first-time applicants), you can apply at acceptance facilities which include post offices, clerk of courts, and libraries. Please [contact your local acceptance facility](#) to confirm if it is open or closed. If you want to apply at a post office, you will need to make an appointment directly on the USPS.com website.

10. Can I renew by mail?

You can still apply by mail. However, unless you have a life-or-death emergency, **you will experience delays before receiving your new passport** and the return of your previous passport. We will not offer normal processing times until phase three of our reopening plan.

You **do not** need to renew your passport before it expires unless you are planning to travel internationally. Customers eligible to renew their passport have up to five years to renew their document after it expires. After five years from the expiration date, you must apply in person. Most countries require that your U.S. passport have at least six months of validity beyond the dates of your trip.

11. Is it safe to travel internationally?

The Department of State currently has in place a ‘[Level 4: Global Health Advisory](#).’ which advises that U.S. citizens avoid all international travel because of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Everyone considering international travel at this time should read the advisory and familiarize themselves with the risks.

12. Will REAL ID still be enforced at airports later this year?

No. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) extended the deadline for REAL ID by one year until October 1, 2021. Beginning in October 2021, DHS will require customers to use a REAL ID to fly domestically. The most common REAL ID is a state-issued driver's license. A U.S. passport book and passport card are two of many alternative documents that customers can use to fly domestically if they do not have a state-issued REAL ID. For more information on REAL ID, go to [DHS' website](#).

13. How will the customer experience be different in the coming months?

Because we are resuming operations in phases and will not have full staffing in our agencies and centers until phase three, we will not immediately offer upgrades to expedited service and we will not be able to immediately commit to specific processing times for routine service.

We encourage customers to apply for passport services by mail where there is no need to be physically present at a passport office. Services by mail include passport renewals (for customers who meet certain criteria), name and data changes, and applying for a passport card or book if the customer is already in possession of one or the other document.

The health and safety of our customers and our employees will remain the highest priority as we reopen. At our agencies and centers, customers will notice measures to ensure social distancing in our waiting rooms with fewer chairs and appointments. Hours of operation may be different. Some of our acceptance facility partners may also stop offering walk-in services and may require appointments to ensure social distancing.

14. What about customers overseas who need a passport?

Our embassies and consulates are currently providing emergency passport services to customers overseas. For emergency passport services for U.S. citizens abroad, please [contact the U.S. embassy or consulate](#) closest to your current location. Customers should expect delays when applying for non-emergency passport or citizenship services. We hope to return to normal passport processing, as soon as it is safe for us to do so.