

How to Renew or Apply for a Passport

Q. How much advance time do I need to apply for a passport?

A. It can never be too soon -- whether or not you have a foreign trip planned. Obviously, with a passport in hand, you can leave with little notice. However, if your passport is nearing its expiration date, renew as soon as possible, because some countries require passports to be valid six months after a traveler's entry or return date. Another issue to consider: Some nations require passports to have two to four blank pages for visas and stamps.

Where can I find passport information?

The U.S. State Department is the official source, and its Web site (<http://www.travel.state.gov/>) clearly outlines the process, requirements, fees, etc. It also includes updates, such as information on the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (see box at right for more details).

Can I apply by mail?

Not if you're a first-timer. Mail-ins are for renewers whose old passports are not damaged, stolen or expired, and were issued in the past 15 years. The passport also must have been issued after your 16th birthday, and there must be no name change that you cannot legally prove.

To renew a passport, in a padded envelope send a DS-82 application form (available on the State Department's Web site, at post offices and at travel agencies; see below), your most recent passport, two identical 2-by-2-inch passport photos and a \$67 check made out to the U.S. Department of State. If your name has changed, also include a certified copy of the legal document specifying the change (e.g., marriage license, adoption papers, etc.).

Mail to National Passport Processing, P.O. Box 13349, Philadelphia, Pa. 19101-3349. If you use a mail service that does not deliver to post office boxes, send to National Passport Processing, Attn: Department 13349, 1617 Brett Rd., New Castle, Del. 19720.

You can also request a larger, 48-page passport for no extra fee; simply attach a signed request to your application. Your new passport should arrive within six weeks, barring a natural disaster or other unforeseen incident. During busier times, such as the summer travel season, the department recommends using expedited service (see below) if you are departing in less than eight weeks. Your dog-eared, stamp-plastered passport will be returned for future gloating purposes.

Who must apply in person, and what is the process?

If any of the following apply to you, then head to your nearest passport facility.

- You're a first-time applicant.

- Your passport was lost, stolen or damaged. (If it was lost or stolen, you must also complete form DS-64.)
- Your old passport expired and was issued more than 15 years ago or when you were younger than 16.
- Your name has changed since your last passport was issued and you do not have the legal documentation to prove it.
- You're a minor, 14 to 17 years old. A parent or legal guardian (with ID) must be present if the teenager does not have acceptable identification. Parental consent also may be requested. For children younger than 14, consent and/or appearance by both parents or legal guardians is required, as is proof of relationship (e.g., their names on the child's certified birth certificate).

And, yes, even newborns and toddlers need a passport and must be present when their parents apply on their behalf.

Application materials include form DS-11 (but unlike the mail-in, *do not* sign it until the passport official gives the word); proof of U.S. citizenship, including a birth or naturalization certificate, among other official documents; personal identification, such as a valid driver's license or military ID; two 2-by-2-inch passport photos taken in the past six months; and payment of \$97 (16 and older) or \$82 (younger than 16).

Where do I go to apply in person?

There are about 8,500 application facilities nationwide, including many federal, state and probate courts, post offices, public libraries and county and municipal offices. The department's Web site (<http://iafdb.travel.state.gov/>) will help you find outposts in your neighborhood. In the District, for example, the post offices at 1200 Pennsylvania Ave. NW and 3430 Connecticut Ave. NW provide such services, but only during specific hours or by appointment, so check ahead.

I'm in a hurry -- my trip is in two weeks!

For expedited service, you can apply by mail or in person. For the mail-in, send in the requisite materials plus an additional \$60 and overnight delivery costs. Write "Expedited" on the envelope; no proof of departure is required. To ensure timely delivery -- two weeks door-to-door -- splurge on two-way overnight delivery.

If you're leaving in two weeks or less, don't risk the mail. Instead make an appointment with a Passport Agency. Bring with you all of the necessary documents and the extra \$60. In Washington, the center is at 1111 19th St. NW and is open weekdays from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. You can schedule an appointment via automated service at 877-487-2778.

For even faster -- but costlier -- service, employ a private company that can deliver your passport in a jiffy, say 24 hours. Instant Passport, for one, lists turnaround times of one to six

business days (\$149 on top of government fees) and seven to 20 days (\$109). Info: 800-284-2564, <http://www.instantpassport.com/>. Other firms include American Passport Express (800-841-6778, <http://www.americanpassport.com/>) and PassportsVisaExpress.com (888-596-6028, <http://www.passportvisaexpress.com/>).

Where can I find additional help?

For advice or a status report on your application, contact the National Passport Information Center at 877-487-2778 or check online at http://https://passportstatus.state.gov/opss/OPSS_Status_i.asp. The site will let you know if your application has been received by Passport Services and about when to expect your passport.

(posted 08/01)