



HOW TO GET A U.S. PASSPORT IN 2026

Step-by-Step Guide to New Rules,
Online Renewal, and Faster Processing

INSIDE THIS GUIDE

3 Ways to Apply and
Which One You Need

Online Renewal
Rules Explained

Full 2026 Fee
Breakdown

Avoid the New Photo
Rejection Rule

Real Processing Times
(Door-to-Door)

5 Mistakes That
Delay Your Passport

How to Get a U.S. Passport in 2026 — Complete Guide

Everything that changed in 2026, plus the full step-by-step process for first-time applicants and renewers. This free guide goes deeper than the video — every fee, every deadline, every gotcha, and the official phone numbers and websites you need.

\$165

First-Time Adult

\$130 application + \$35 acceptance fee

8–10wk

Door-to-Door

Routine processing, including mail time

\$130

Online Renewal

No acceptance fee at opr.travel.state.gov

0

AI Photo Edits

Explicitly banned — use plain camera, no filters



What Changed in 2026

The year 2026 brings several significant updates to the U.S. passport application and renewal landscape, primarily focused on modernizing processes and enhancing security. These changes aim to streamline applications for eligible citizens while reinforcing the integrity of travel documents.

The most impactful shift is the full implementation of the Online Passport Renewal (OPR) system, a welcome convenience for many. Alongside this, stricter guidelines have been issued regarding passport photo submissions, particularly concerning AI-assisted alterations. Understanding these key adjustments is crucial to ensure a smooth application experience.

Online Renewal Fully Live

The **Online Passport Renewal (OPR)** system is now fully operational for eligible applicants, allowing renewals to be completed entirely digitally. This eliminates the need for physical mail-ins and waives the traditional acceptance fee.

Stricter Photo Guidelines

New regulations explicitly prohibit the use of **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** tools or filters for passport photos. Photos must be raw, unedited captures from a camera, reflecting an applicant's true appearance without any digital enhancements.

Enhanced Security Features

New passport books now incorporate advanced biometric and holographic security elements to combat counterfeiting and enhance international travel security. These features are designed to be more durable and difficult to replicate.



What Changed in 2026

If you applied for a passport before 2025, the process has shifted in three important ways. Knowing these up front saves weeks of frustration.

1. Online Passport Renewal (OPR) is Now Fully Open

The State Department's online renewal system at opr.travel.state.gov is no longer in beta. Most adults renewing a 10-year book can now do the entire process digitally – no mailing the old passport, no post office trip. See "Bucket 2: Renew Online" for the seven eligibility rules.

2. AI-Edited Photos Are Explicitly Banned

The official rule reads: *"Do not change your photo using computer software, phone apps or filters, or artificial intelligence."* Smartphone cameras often apply auto-enhancement, beauty filters, or HDR by default – any of these can trigger rejection. Use the plain camera app with all enhancements off, or pay \$12–\$15 at a CVS, Walgreens, USPS, or library photo service.

3. REAL ID Enforcement Is Driving Record Demand

Since the May 7, 2025 REAL ID enforcement deadline, millions of Americans whose state driver's licenses are not REAL-ID-compliant are using a passport book or passport card just to fly inside the United States. Acceptance facility appointments are booking out further than ever. Plan ahead.



Other 2026 Changes Worth Knowing

1. TSA ConfirmID — \$45 Safety Net

As of February 1, 2026, if you arrive at airport security without a REAL-ID-compliant license OR a passport, TSA offers a manual identity verification for \$45, valid for a 10-day travel window. This is a last-resort safety net, not a plan – over a year of travel it's far more expensive than just getting a passport card (\$30) once.

2. Single-Size 38-Page Book Coming

On April 20, 2026, the State Department issued a formal notice that all future U.S. passport books will be a single 38-page size. The change rolls out with the next-generation passport redesign anticipated in 2028, so it does not affect 2026 applicants.

3. Sex Marker Policy (EO 14168)

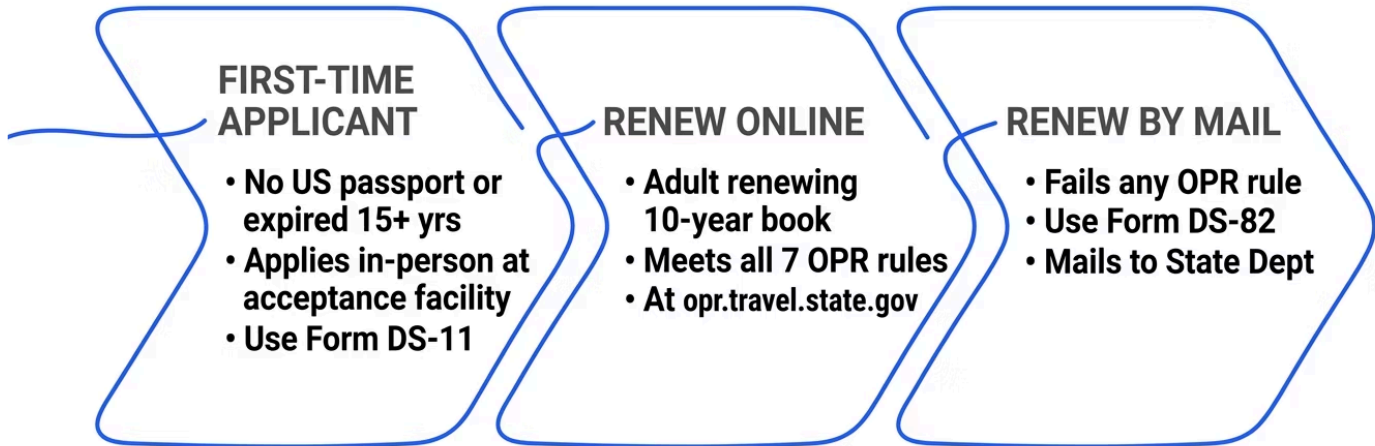
The "X" sex marker option is no longer available on new applications. Applicants must select "M" or "F" matching their supporting citizenship document. Existing passports with an "X" marker remain valid until they expire.

All other passport rules, fees, and timelines remain consistent with prior years. The rest of this guide reflects these 2026 updates throughout.



Sort Yourself Into One of Three Buckets

The bucket you fall into decides which form you use, where you submit it, and what it costs. Find your situation below before doing anything else.



Bucket	Who You Are	Form	Where You Apply
1. First-Time Applicant	Never had a US passport, last one expired 15+ years ago, or you got it as a child	DS-11	In-person at acceptance facility
2. Renew Online	Adult renewing a 10-year book, meets all 7 OPR rules	Online form	opr.travel.state.gov
3. Renew by Mail	Renewer who fails any OPR rule	DS-82	By mail to State Department

Bucket 1: First-Time Applicant (DS-11)

You must apply in person if any of these apply to you:

- You have never been issued a U.S. passport
- Your most recent passport was issued when you were **under age 16**
- Your most recent passport was issued **more than 15 years ago**
- Your most recent passport was **lost, stolen, or significantly damaged**
- Your name has changed and you cannot document the change with a court order or marriage certificate

What to Bring — Checklist

- Form DS-11 — completed online, printed, **DO NOT SIGN** (sign in front of agent)
- Proof of U.S. citizenship (original + photocopy)
- Government-issued photo ID (original + photocopy front and back, on plain 8.5×11 paper)
- One passport-style color photo taken within the last 6 months
- Application fee — check or money order to "U.S. Department of State"
- Acceptance fee — \$35, often paid separately by card or cash to the facility

Where to Apply

There are roughly **7,500 passport acceptance facilities** nationwide:

- **Most U.S. Post Offices** — many require an appointment booked through tools.usps.com/scheduler
- **Many public libraries** — often offer evening or weekend hours that post offices do not
- **Some county/city clerk offices**

Search the official locator at

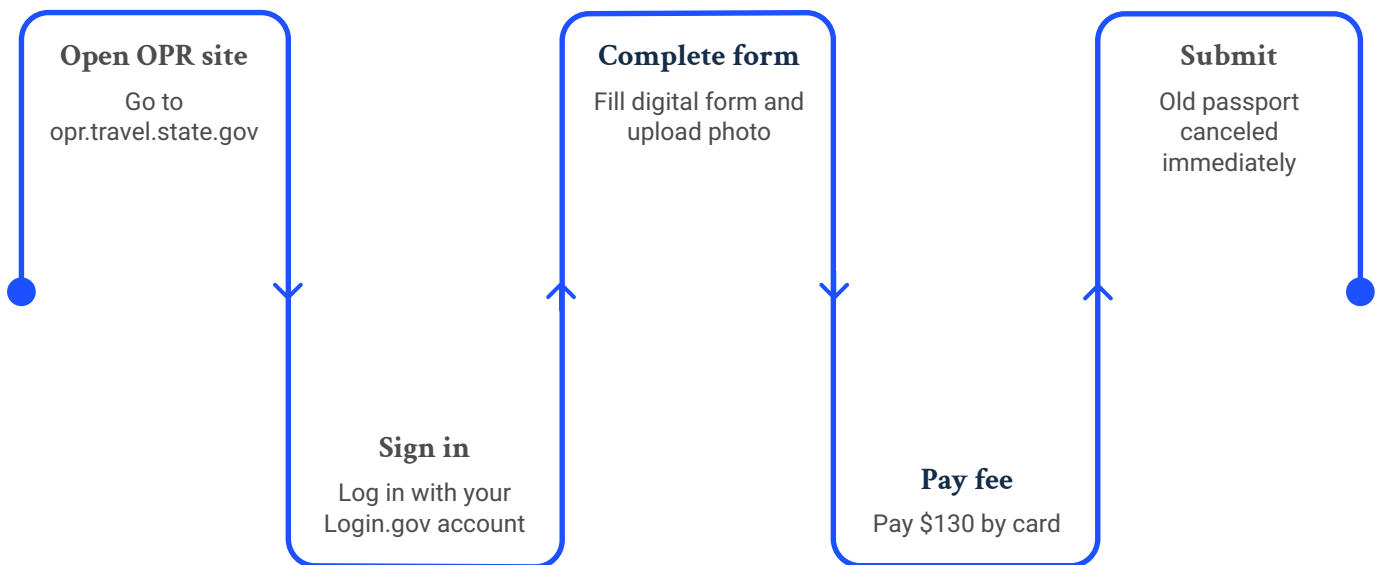
iafdb.travel.state.gov.

Bucket 2: Renew Online (OPR)

The fastest, cheapest path – but you must meet **all seven** of these rules. Fail even one and you must use Bucket 3.

- Age 25 or older
- Most recent passport was a 10-year book (not a child's passport or card-only)
- Passport expiring within 1 year, or expired less than 5 years ago
- No changes to name, sex, or other personal info
- Physically inside the U.S. or a territory when you submit
- Not traveling for the next 6 weeks (no expedite available)
- Passport is undamaged and not lost or stolen

How OPR Works



Only **opr.travel.state.gov** is the authorized URL. The State Department warns that other websites claiming to renew your passport online may be fraudulent. Even sites with "Gov" or "Passport" in the name are not authorized – they charge extra fees and put your data at risk.

Bucket 3: Renew by Mail (DS-82)

If you can renew but you fail any single OPR rule, you mail in Form DS-82. This is still a straightforward process – just requires more preparation.

Common Reasons People End Up in Bucket 3

- You changed your name (need to attach marriage certificate, divorce decree, or court order)
- You're traveling within 6 weeks (OPR can't expedite – DS-82 with the \$60 expedite add-on can)
- You're outside the U.S. when applying
- You're under 25
- You want to upgrade from book-only to book + card

What to Mail

- Completed **Form DS-82**
- Your **most recent passport** (will be canceled and returned with the new one)
- A **new passport photo** (within last 6 months)
- A **check or money order** to "U.S. Department of State"
- If applicable: legal documentation for name change

i Use a **trackable mail service** (USPS Priority Mail with tracking, FedEx, UPS). **Save your tracking number.** Mail to the address printed on the latest version of Form DS-82 – addresses change, so always pull the form fresh from travel.state.gov.





Documents You Need

Proof of U.S. Citizenship

- **Long-form U.S. birth certificate** – certified copy from state vital records, listing both parents' names, with raised/embossed/multicolored seal. Hospital "souvenir" certificates are **NOT accepted**.
- **Previous U.S. passport** – undamaged
- Naturalization certificate
- Certificate of Citizenship
- Consular Report of Birth Abroad (FS-240)

Government-Issued Photo ID

- Valid driver's license or state ID
- Military ID
- Federal/state government employee ID
- Current valid U.S. passport (if applying for a card or vice versa)

You will also need a **photocopy** of the front and back of your photo ID, on plain 8.5×11 paper.

Photo Requirements (2026 Rules)

- **2×2 inches, color, taken within the last 6 months**
- Plain white or off-white background
- Neutral facial expression, both eyes open
- No glasses, no hats, no head coverings (except religious daily wear)
- Standard street clothing – no uniforms
- **NO digital editing of any kind:** no software, no phone apps, no filters, no AI tools
- For online renewal: JPEG, less than 240 KB, minimum 600×600 pixels

Easiest path: pay \$12–\$15 at a USPS, CVS, Walgreens, or library photo service.

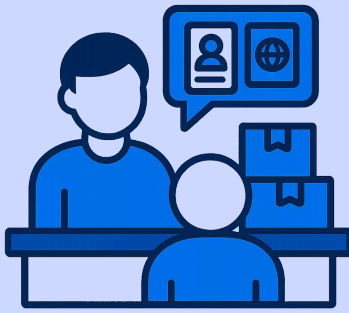


2026 Fees Breakdown

Understanding exactly what you'll pay prevents surprises at the counter. Here is every fee for every scenario.

Required Fees

Applicant	Document	Application Fee	Execution Fee	Total
Adult first-time	Passport book	\$130	\$35	\$165
Adult renewal (DS-82 or OPR)	Passport book	\$130	\$0	\$130
Adult first-time	Passport book + card	\$160	\$35	\$195
Adult renewal	Passport book + card	\$160	\$0	\$160
Adult first-time	Passport card only	\$30	\$35	\$65
Adult renewal	Passport card only	\$30	\$0	\$30
Child under 16	Passport book	\$100	\$35	\$135
Child under 16	Passport card	\$15	\$35	\$50



Optional Add-Ons & Total Cost

Optional Add-Ons

Service	Fee	What It Covers
Expedited processing	+\$60	Cuts agency time from 4–6 weeks to 2–3 weeks
1–3 day return shipping	+\$22.05	Faster delivery of finished passport (book only, not card)
Passport photo at retailer	\$12–\$15	Avoids photo-rejection risk
File search fee	\$150	Only if you have no proof of citizenship and your record is from before 1994

- Realistic total cost – fast-track first-time adult: \$165 + \$60 expedite + \$22.05 fast shipping = \$247.05

Real Processing Times — Door to Door

Don't confuse **agency processing time** (the State Department's quoted window) with **door-to-door time** (how long until the passport is in your hand). The difference can be weeks.

Service	Agency Processing	Door-to-Door Reality
Routine	4–6 weeks	8–10 weeks
Expedited (in-person or DS-82 + \$60)	2–3 weeks	5–7 weeks
Online renewal (OPR – routine only)	4–6 weeks	6–8 weeks (no inbound mail leg)
Urgent travel <14 days	1–14 days	Same-day to 3 days (appointment required)
Life-or-death emergency <72 hours	<72 hours	<72 hours – special phone line, proof required



PLAN AHEAD

(10+ weeks out)

Routine Processing.
8-10 weeks
door-to-door.



EXPEDITE

(5-10 weeks out)

Pay \$60 extra.
5-7 weeks
door-to-door.



URGENT APPOINTMENT

(3 weeks or less)

Regional Passport
Agency.
Same-day to 3 days.



EMERGENCY

(72 hours or less)

Call 1-877-487-2778.
Proof of emergency
required.

⚠ Travel rule of thumb: Add a 2-week buffer to whatever the State Department quotes. Mailing in both directions eats time, and processing is often slower in spring/summer travel surge season.

The Five Most Common Delay Mistakes

These five mistakes account for the vast majority of passport rejections, delays, and wasted weeks. Read each one carefully before you submit.

1 Using an AI-Touched-Up Photo

Why it happens: Modern phone cameras apply auto-enhancement, HDR, beauty filters, or background blur by default. Many users don't realize their "raw" photo isn't actually raw.

How to avoid: Turn off all enhancements (Portrait Mode, Live Photo, HDR, beauty filters, color filters). Better yet: pay \$12–\$15 at a CVS, Walgreens, USPS, library, or AAA office.

2 Using a Third-Party "Passport" Website

Why it happens: Scam sites buy ads on Google with names like "US Passport Help," "Govt Passport Office," or "Passport Renewal Services." Even sites with "Gov" in the URL are not official.

How to avoid: The only official site is **travel.state.gov**. The only legitimate online renewal site is **opr.travel.state.gov**. Every form (DS-11, DS-82, DS-64) is free to download from travel.state.gov.

3 Applying Online (OPR) When You Don't Qualify

Why it happens: The system may accept your application up front, then reject it weeks later when a human reviewer notices you didn't meet one of the seven rules. You lose two weeks AND have to start over.

How to avoid: Read the seven OPR rules carefully before starting. If you're under 25, recently changed your name, are abroad, or are traveling within 6 weeks – you don't qualify.

4 Sending the Wrong Citizenship Document

Why it happens: The hospital "souvenir" certificate parents get at birth (often with footprints) is not legal proof of citizenship. Some states' "short form" certificates also fall short.

How to avoid: Request a **long-form certified copy** from your state's vital records office. Look for the raised, embossed, or multicolored seal and both parents' names listed.

5 Assuming You Have Time

Why it happens: People see "4–6 weeks routine" on travel.state.gov and don't add the mailing time on either end.

How to avoid: Trip in less than 10 weeks → pay \$60 for expedited service. Trip in less than 3 weeks → urgent appointment at a regional passport agency. Trip in less than 14 days with proof of emergency → call 1-877-487-2778.



Quick Reference Checklist

Print this and check off as you go. Every item here has tripped up real applicants – don't skip any.

Before You Start

- Determine which bucket you're in (1, 2, or 3)
- Confirm you have valid proof of citizenship (long-form birth certificate or old passport)
- Confirm sex marker on application matches your supporting document
- Confirm trip date allows for realistic processing time

Documents

- Filled-out form (DS-11, DS-82, or online via OPR) – DS-11 not signed yet
- Proof of citizenship (original)
- Photocopy of citizenship document (some facilities)
- Government photo ID (original)
- Photocopy of front + back of photo ID (plain 8.5×11)
- Compliant 2×2 photo (no AI/filters/edits)

Payment

- Check or money order for application fee, payable to "U.S. Department of State"
- Separate \$35 for acceptance fee (in-person only)
- \$60 added if you want expedited processing
- \$22.05 added if you want 1–3 day return shipping

After Submission

- Save your application receipt and tracking number
- Check status at passportstatus.state.gov (allow 7–10 days for first update)
- Sign up for email/text status alerts
- Keep your old passport tracking – it returns separately from the new one

Official Resources

Use only these official government sources. Every form is free. Every website listed here is authorized by the U.S. Department of State.

U.S. Department of State — Websites

- **Main passport site:** travel.state.gov
- **Online renewal (OPR):** opr.travel.state.gov
- **Status check:** passportstatus.state.gov
- **Acceptance facility locator:** iafdb.travel.state.gov
- **Regional passport agency appointments:** travel.state.gov/passport-agency

Phone

- **National Passport Information Center:** 1-877-487-2778
- **TDD/TTY:** 1-888-874-7793
- **Hours:** Mon–Fri 8 AM–10 PM ET; Sat 10 AM–3 PM ET (excluding federal holidays)
- **Overseas Citizens Services:** 1-202-501-4444

Forms (All Free)

- **DS-11** (first-time): travel.state.gov/forms/ds-11
- **DS-82** (renewal by mail): travel.state.gov/forms/ds-82
- **DS-64** (lost/stolen): travel.state.gov/forms/ds-64
- **DS-3053** (parental consent for minors): travel.state.gov/forms/ds-3053

When to Call vs. When to Use the Website

Situation	Use
General questions, status check	passportstatus.state.gov
Need to expedite for travel within 14 days	Call 1-877-487-2778
Life-or-death emergency travel within 72 hours	Call 1-877-487-2778
Lost/stolen passport abroad	Nearest U.S. embassy or consulate

⊗ Never use a third-party website to submit forms or pay fees. All official forms are **free** at travel.state.gov. If a site is charging you to download a form, it is not authorized.

About This Guide

This guide was created by **GovClarity**, an independent educational resource that simplifies government procedures for everyday Americans.

Source & Accuracy

Based on official information from **travel.state.gov** as of April 2026. Government rules and fees change – always confirm current details on the official site before applying.

Watch the Full Video

companion video walkthrough is available on the GovClarity YouTube channel – covers the same material with visual demonstrations of the application process. Find it along with the rest of our travel and ID guides at govclarity.net/category/travel-id.

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