



HOW TO GET A U.S. PASSPORT IN 2026

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

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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

4–6wk

Routine Processing

Agency processing, plus up to 2 weeks of mailing each way

\$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

Here is what applicants in 2026 need to know about how the passport process works now.

Online Passport Renewal (OPR), fully available since September 2024, is now the easiest option for many renewers. The State Department also says plainly that passport photos may not be changed with software, filters, or artificial intelligence.

Online Renewal

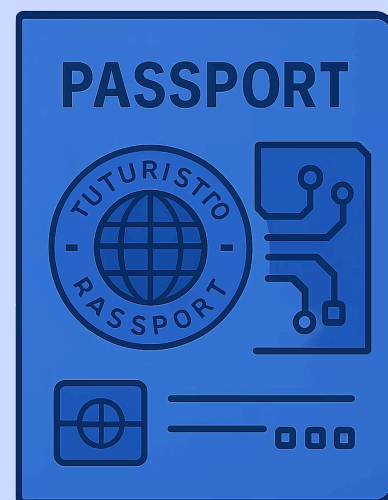
The **Online Passport Renewal (OPR)** system has been fully available since September 2024. Eligible applicants renew entirely online, keep their old passport (it is canceled), and pay no acceptance fee.

Photo Rules

The State Department prohibits using **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** tools, software, apps, or filters to change a passport photo. Your photo must show how you look now, with no digital changes.

Passport Card Limits

A passport card is accepted as ID at TSA checkpoints for domestic flights, but it is not valid for international air travel. Use a passport book to fly abroad.



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 Fully Open

The State Department's online renewal system at **opr.travel.state.gov** has been fully available since September 2024. If you meet the eligibility rules, you can renew a 10-year passport book or card entirely online, with no mailing and 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."* Turn off beauty filters and other photo effects on your phone, or have your photo taken at a passport photo service.

3. A Passport Works as REAL ID at TSA

Since REAL ID enforcement began on May 7, 2025, a passport book or passport card is an accepted ID at TSA checkpoints for travelers whose license is not REAL ID compliant. 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, and TSA cannot guarantee it will verify your identity. A first-time passport card costs \$65 (\$30 plus the \$35 acceptance fee).

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. The State Department issues only "M" or "F" markers matching the applicant's biological sex at birth. Existing passports with an "X" marker remain valid until they expire.

The rest of this guide reflects current rules and fees as of October 2026.



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, or your last one was issued 15+ years ago, before age 16, or was lost, stolen, or damaged	DS-11	In-person at acceptance facility
2. Renew Online	Adult renewing a 10-year book or card, meets all 7 OPR rules	Online form	opr.travel.state.gov
3. Renew by Mail	Eligible to renew, but can't use OPR	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, paid separately to the facility (ask what payment it takes)

Where to Apply

There are more than **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**

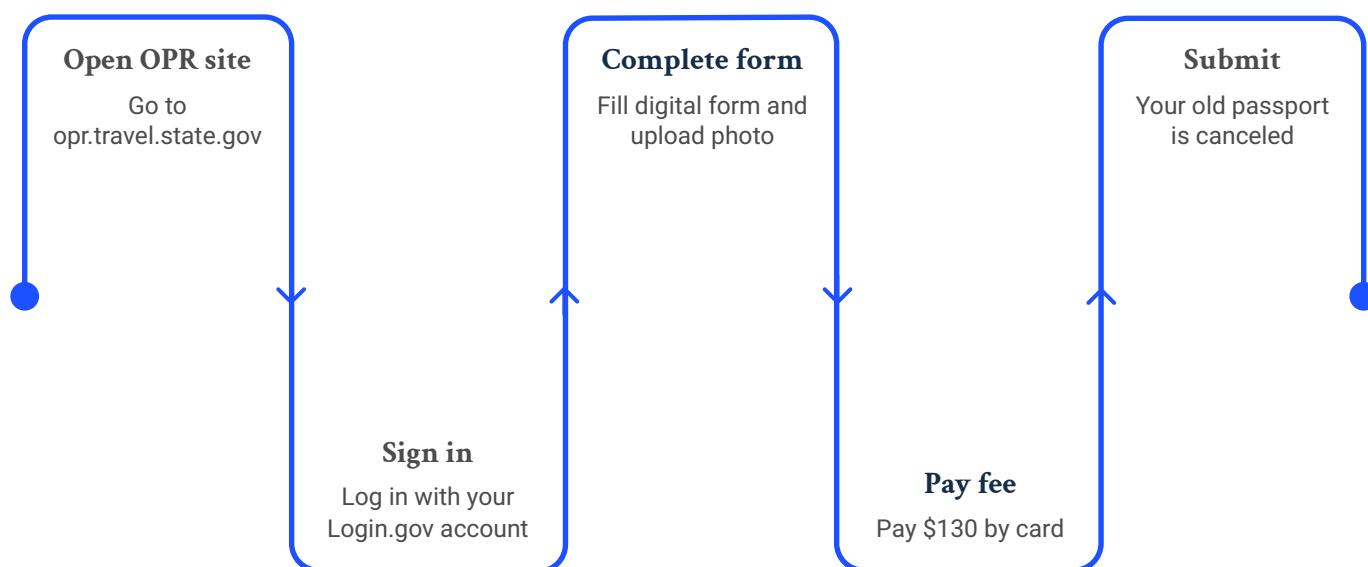
Search the official locator at iafdb.travel.state.gov.

Bucket 2: Renew Online (OPR)

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

- Age 25 or older
- The passport you're renewing was issued for 10 years (a book or a card, not a child's 5-year passport)
- 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't renew online but still meet the mail rules, use Form DS-82. Your most recent passport must have been issued when you were 16 or older, within the last 15 years, and be in your possession and undamaged. If not, go back to Bucket 1.

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 can, for \$60. Traveling in under 3 weeks? Make a passport agency appointment instead)
- You're outside the U.S. (outside the U.S. and Canada, contact the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate for how to renew)
- You're under 25
- You have only a passport card and want only a book

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

 Use a **trackable mail service** through USPS. Do not use UPS, FedEx, or DHL, because the mailing addresses are PO boxes. **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

- **U.S. birth certificate** issued by the city, county, or state of birth, showing your full name, birth date and place, your parent(s)' full names, the date filed, the registrar's signature, and the official 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)

Bring the physical ID card (a digital or mobile ID is not enough). 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 or head coverings, except for religious or medical reasons
- Standard street clothing — no uniforms
- **NO digital editing of any kind:** no software, no phone apps, no filters, no AI tools
- For online renewal: a JPG, JPEG, PNG, HEIC, or HEIF file between 54 KB and 10 MB

Easiest path: have your photo taken at a passport photo service. Many acceptance facilities offer one. Print forms and photocopies single-sided on white 8.5×11 paper.

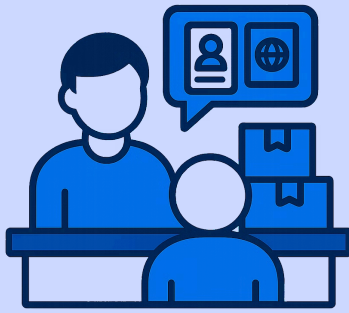


2026 Fees Breakdown

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	+\$26.87	Faster delivery of finished passport (book only, not card)
Passport photo service	Varies	Avoids photo-rejection risk
File search fee	\$150	If you had a U.S. passport but can't submit it. Pay up front only for records from before 1994

☐ Realistic total cost, fast-track first-time adult: \$165 + \$60 expedite + \$26.87 fast return shipping = \$251.87

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	Up to 10 weeks
Expedited (in-person or DS-82 + \$60)	2–3 weeks	Up to 7 weeks
Online renewal (OPR — routine only)	4–6 weeks	Up to 8 weeks (no inbound mail leg)
Urgent travel within 14 days	Appointment required	Bring proof of travel
Life-or-death emergency, travel within 2 weeks	Appointment required	Bring proof of the emergency and of travel

 **Travel rule of thumb:** Processing times don't include mailing, which can take up to 2 weeks each way. The busiest season runs from late winter through summer.

The Five Most Common Delay Mistakes

These five common mistakes cause rejections, delays, and wasted weeks. Read each one carefully before you submit.

1 Using an AI-Touched-Up Photo

Why it happens: Phone cameras can add beauty filters, effects, or background blur, and the State Department prohibits any digital change to a passport photo.

How to avoid: Turn off filters and effects, or use a passport photo service.

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: If you don't meet every rule, your online application can be rejected and you'll have to apply another way, losing time.

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

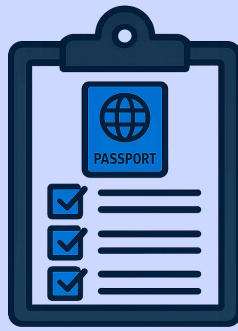
Why it happens: The hospital "souvenir" certificate parents get at birth (often with footprints) is not legal proof of citizenship. Some states' "short form" certificates may also lack required information.

How to avoid: Request a **certified copy** from your state's vital records office that shows your parent(s)' names, the registrar's signature, and the official seal.

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 → consider paying \$60 for expedited service. Trip within 14 days → book an urgent passport agency appointment at passportappointment.travel.state.gov (already applied? call 1-877-487-2778). Immediate family member abroad has died or is dying, and you travel within 2 weeks → use the life-or-death emergency process.



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 (certified birth certificate or old passport)
- ☐ Select the M or F sex marker that matches your sex at birth
- ☐ 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 (required for DS-11)
- ☐ 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
- ☐ \$26.87 added if you want 1–3 day return shipping

After Submission

- ☐ Save your application receipt and tracking number
- ☐ Check status at passportstatus.state.gov (the first update can take up to 2 weeks)
- ☐ Watch your email for status updates
- ☐ Your old passport and documents may arrive 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
- **Urgent appointments:** passportappointment.travel.state.gov

Phone

- **National Passport Information Center:** 1-877-487-2778
- **TDD/TTY:** 1-888-874-7793
- **Hours:** Mon–Fri 8 AM–10 PM ET; Sat–Sun 10 AM–3 PM ET (excluding federal holidays)
- **Emergencies abroad (calling from outside the U.S.):** 1-202-501-4444

Forms (All Free)

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

When to Call vs. When to Use the Website

Situation	Use
General questions, status check	passportstatus.state.gov
Urgent travel within 14 days	Book at passportappointment.travel.state.gov (already applied? call 1-877-487-2778)
Life-or-death family emergency, travel within 2 weeks	Call 1-877-487-2778 (weekdays 8 AM–8 PM ET) or 202-647-4000 after hours
Lost/stolen passport abroad	Nearest U.S. embassy or consulate

⊗ Never use a third-party website to renew online or to download forms. 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

Updated October 2026 using official information from **travel.state.gov** and **tsa.gov**. 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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