



Securing today  
and tomorrow

# Your Social Security Number and Card

[SSA.gov](https://www.ssa.gov)



You need a Social Security number to work. We use your Social Security number to record your earnings and determine your eligibility for Social Security benefits and certain government services. Many financial institutions, such as banks and credit companies, also ask for your number when you open an account.

If you are a noncitizen living in the United States, you also may need a Social Security number. For more information, see *Social Security Numbers for Noncitizens* (Publication No. 05-10096). If you are temporarily in the United States to work, see *Foreign Workers and Social Security Numbers* (Publication No. 05-10107).

## How do I get a number and card?

To apply for a Social Security number and card you must:

- Complete an *Application for a Social Security Card* (Form SS-5).
- Show us original documents or copies certified by the issuing agency. We cannot accept photocopies or notarized copies. All of the following documents must be current (not expired):
  - U.S. citizenship or immigration status (including Department of Homeland Security (DHS) permission to work in the United States).
  - Age.
  - Identity.

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You can mail your completed Application for a Social Security Card (Form SS-5) along with your documents to your **local Social Security office**.

An in-person interview is required for anyone age 12 or older requesting an original Social Security number and card even if a parent or guardian will sign the application on the child's behalf.

**Citizenship or immigration status:**

We can accept only certain documents as proof of U.S. citizenship. These include a U.S. birth certificate, a U.S. passport, Certificate of Naturalization or Certificate of Citizenship. If you are not a U.S. citizen, Social Security will ask to see your current U.S. immigration documents. Acceptable documents may include your:

- Form I-551, *Permanent Resident Card* (green card, includes machine-readable immigrant visa with your unexpired foreign passport).
- I-94, *Arrival/Departure Record*, with your unexpired foreign passport.
- I-766, *Employment Authorization Card* (EAD, work permit).

International students must present further documentation. For more information, see *International Students and Social Security Numbers* (Publication No. 05-10181).

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**Age:** If you are U.S. born, you need to present your U.S. birth certificate (if one exists, you must submit it). If a birth certificate does not exist, we may be able to accept one of the following:

- Religious record made before the age of 5 showing your date of birth.
- U.S. hospital record of your birth.
- Passport.

If you are foreign born, you need to present your foreign birth certificate (if you have one, or can get a copy within 10 business days). If you cannot get it, we may be able accept your foreign passport and one of the following:

- I-551 Lawful Permanent Resident Card.
- I-94 Arrival/Departure Record.

**Identity:** We can accept only certain documents as proof of identity. An acceptable document must be current (not expired) and show your name, identifying information, and preferably a recent photograph. Social Security will ask to see a U.S. driver's license, state-issued nondriver identification card, or U.S. passport as proof of identity. If you don't have the specific documents we ask for, we'll ask to see other documents including:

- Employee ID card.
- School ID card.
- Health insurance card (not a Medicare card).
- U.S. military ID card.

- Adoption decree.
- Life insurance policy.
- Marriage document (only in name change situations).

***All documents must be either originals or copies certified by the issuing agency. We can't accept photocopies or notarized copies of documents.*** We may use one document for two purposes. For example, we may use your U.S. passport as proof of both citizenship and identity. Or, we may use your U.S. birth certificate as proof of age and citizenship. ***However, you must provide at least two separate documents.***

We will mail your Social Security card as soon as we have all of your information and have verified your documents with the issuing offices.

## What does it cost?

There is no charge for a Social Security number and card. If someone wants to charge you for getting a number or card, please remember that these services are free. You can report anyone attempting to charge you by contacting our Office of the Inspector General at ***<https://oig.ssa.gov>***.

## Are there different types of cards?

We issue three types of Social Security cards. All cards show your name and Social Security number.

- The first type of card shows only your name and Social Security number. People who have this type of card can work without restriction. We issue it to:
  - U.S. citizens.
  - People with Lawful Permanent Resident status.
- The second type of card shows your name and number and notes, “VALID FOR WORK ONLY WITH DHS AUTHORIZATION.” We issue this type of card to people lawfully admitted to the United States on a temporary basis who have DHS authorization to work.
- The third type of card shows your name and number and notes, “NOT VALID FOR EMPLOYMENT.” We issue it to people from other countries who meet one of the following:
  - Are lawfully admitted to the United States without work authorization from DHS, but with a valid nonwork reason for needing a Social Security number.
  - Need a number because of a federal law requiring a Social Security number to get a benefit or service.

## How do I get my child a Social Security number?

It is a good idea to get the number when your child is born. You can apply for a Social Security number for your baby

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when you apply for your baby's birth certificate. The state agency that issues birth certificates will share your child's information with us. We'll mail the Social Security card to you.

Or, you can wait and apply at any Social Security office. If you wait, you must provide evidence of your child's age, identity, and U.S. citizenship status. You must show us evidence of your relationship to, or responsibility for the child. You also must show us proof of your identity. We must verify your child's birth record, which can add up to 12 weeks to the time it takes to issue a card. To verify a birth record, Social Security will contact the office that issued it.

**Adoption:** We can assign your adopted child a number before the adoption is complete, but you may want to wait. Then, you can apply for the number using your child's new name. If you want to claim your child for tax purposes while the adoption is still pending, contact the Internal Revenue Service for Form W-7A, *Application for Taxpayer Identification Number for Pending U.S. Adoptions*. For more information, see *Social Security Numbers for Children* (Publication No. 05-10023).

## What if my name changed?

If you legally change your name because of marriage, divorce, court order or any other reason, you need to tell Social

Security so we can get a corrected card. If you are working, also tell your employer. If you do not tell us when your name changes, it may:

- Delay your tax refund.
- Prevent your wages from being posted correctly to your Social Security record, which may lower the amount of your future Social Security benefits.

If you need to change your name on your Social Security card, you must show us a document that proves your legal name change. Documents we may accept as proof of a legal name change include:

- Marriage document.
- Divorce decree.
- Certificate of Naturalization showing a new name.
- Court order for a name change.

If the document you provide as evidence of a legal name change doesn't give us enough information to identify you in our records, or if you changed your name more than two years ago (four years ago if you are younger than age 18), you must show us an identity document in your old name (as shown in our records). We will accept an identity document in your old name that has expired.

If you don't have an identity document in your old name, we may accept an unexpired identity document in your new name, as long as we can properly establish your identity in our records.



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Your new card will have the same number as your previous card, but will show your new name.

## How do I make sure my records are accurate?

Each year your employer sends us a copy of your Form W-2 (*Wage and Tax Statement*). We compare your name and Social Security number on Form W-2 with the information in our records. We add the earnings shown on Form W-2 to your Social Security earnings record.

It is critical that your name and Social Security number on your Social Security card agree with your employer's payroll records and Form W-2 so that we can credit your earnings to your record. It is up to you to make sure that your Social Security records and your employer's records match. If your name or number on the Social Security card is incorrect, contact any Social Security office to make changes. Check your Form W-2 to make sure your employer's record is correct and, if it isn't, give your employer the accurate information.

You can check your earnings record with a personal *my* Social Security account. To review your earnings, go to **[www.ssa.gov/myaccount](http://www.ssa.gov/myaccount)** and create an account.

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## What if my immigration status or citizenship changed?

If your immigration status changed or you became a U.S. citizen, you should tell us so we can update your records. To get your immigration status or citizenship corrected, you need to show documents that prove your new status or citizenship. We can accept only certain documents as proof of citizenship for new and replacement cards. These include your U.S. passport, a Certificate of Naturalization or a Certificate of Citizenship. If you aren't a U.S. citizen, Social Security will ask to see your current immigration documents.

## What if my card is lost or stolen?

You can replace your or your child's Social Security card for free if it is lost or stolen. However, card holders are limited to three replacement cards in a year and 10 during a lifetime. Legal name changes and other exceptions don't count toward these limits. For example, changes in noncitizen status that require card updates may not count toward these limits. Also, you may not be affected by these limits if you can prove you need the card to prevent a significant hardship.

To get a replacement Social Security card, you must show us documents proving your identity. You must also

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show us documents proving your age and U.S. citizenship, if they're not already in our records.

Your replacement card will have the same name and number as your previous card.

To get a replacement Social Security card, you'll need to:

- Complete an *Application for a Social Security Card*.
- Present an unexpired original document with identifying information, and preferably, a recent photograph that proves your identity.
- Show evidence of your U.S. citizenship if you were born outside the United States and didn't show proof of citizenship when you got your card.
- Show evidence of your current lawful noncitizen status if you are not a U.S. citizen.

If you are a U.S. citizen, you may be able to request a replacement card online using your free, personal *my* Social Security account at **[www.ssa.gov/myaccount](http://www.ssa.gov/myaccount)**. Visit **[www.ssa.gov/ssnumber](http://www.ssa.gov/ssnumber)** for a list of participating states and other requirements.

## How can I protect my Social Security number?

You should treat your Social Security number as confidential information and avoid giving it out unnecessarily. You should keep your Social Security card in a safe place with your other important papers. Don't carry it with you unless you need to show it to an employer or service provider.

We do several things to protect your number from misuse. For example, we require and carefully inspect proof of identity from people who apply to replace a lost or stolen Social Security card, or apply to correct a card. One reason we do this is to prevent people from fraudulently obtaining Social Security numbers to establish false identities. We maintain the privacy of Social Security records unless:

- The law requires us to disclose information to another government agency.
- Your information is needed to conduct Social Security or other government health or welfare program business.

You should be very careful about sharing your number and card to protect against misuse of your number. Giving your number is voluntary even when you're asked for the number directly. If requested, you should ask:

- Why is your number needed?
- How will they use your number?

- What happens if you refuse?
- What law requires you to give your number?

The answers to these questions can help you decide if you want to give your Social Security number. However, if you are unsure, don't give out your Social Security number until you can confirm the need for it.

## Contacting Social Security

The most convenient way to do business with us from anywhere, on any device, is to visit ***www.ssa.gov***. There are several things you can do online: apply for benefits; get useful information; find publications; and get answers to frequently asked questions.

When you open a personal *my* Social Security account, you have more capabilities. You can review your *Social Security Statement*, verify your earnings, and get estimates of future benefits. You can also print a benefit verification letter, change your direct deposit information, request a replacement Medicare card, get a replacement SSA-1099/1042S, and request a replacement Social Security card (if you have no changes and your state participates).

If you don't have access to the internet, we offer many automated services by telephone, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Call us toll-free at **1-800-772-1213** or at our TTY number, **1-800-325-0778**, if you're deaf or hard of hearing.

A member of our staff can answer your call from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Friday. We ask for your patience during busy periods since you may experience a high rate of busy signals and longer hold times to speak to us. We look forward to serving you.

**Social Security Administration**

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