



Social Security

Your Social Security Number And Card

www.socialsecurity.gov

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A Social Security number is important because you need it to get a job, collect Social Security benefits and receive some other government services. Many other businesses, such as banks and credit companies, also ask for your number.

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:

- Complete an *Application For A Social Security Card* (Form SS-5); and
- Show us original documents or copies certified by the issuing agency proving:
 - U.S. citizenship or immigration status [including Department of Homeland Security (DHS) permission to work in the United States];
 - Age; and
 - Identity.

Then, take or mail your completed application and documents to your local Social Security office.

Citizenship or immigration status:

We can accept only certain documents as proof of U.S. citizenship. These include a U.S. birth certificate, U.S. consular report of birth, 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 include your:

- Form I-551 (includes machine-readable immigrant visa with your unexpired foreign passport);
- I-94 with your unexpired foreign passport; or
- Work permit card from the Department of Homeland Security (I-766 or I-688B).

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

Age: You must present your birth certificate if you have it or can easily obtain it. If not, we can consider other documents, such as your passport to prove age.

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 do not have the specific documents we ask for, we will ask to see other documents including:

- Employee ID card;
- School ID card;
- Marriage document;
- Health insurance card (not a Medicare card);
- U.S. military ID card;
- Adoption decree; or
- Life insurance policy.

All documents must be either originals or copies certified by the issuing agency. We cannot 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 number and 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 contacts you and wants to charge you for getting a number or card, or for any Social Security service, please remember that Social Security services are free. You can report anyone attempting to charge you by calling our Office of the Inspector General hotline at **1-800-269-0271**.

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 your name and Social Security number and lets you work without restriction. We issue it to:
 - U.S. citizens; and
 - People lawfully admitted to the United States on a permanent basis.

- 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 are lawfully admitted to the United States without work authorization from DHS, but with a valid nonwork reason for needing a Social Security number; or
 - Who 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 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 will 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, as well as 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.

Anyone age 12 or older requesting an original Social Security number card must appear for an interview at a Social Security office, even if a parent or guardian will sign the application on the child's behalf.

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 that you 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; and
- 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 recently issued document as proof of your legal name change. Documents Social Security may accept to prove a legal name change include:

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

If the document you provide as evidence of a legal name change does not give us enough information to identify you in our records or if you legally changed your name more than two years ago, you must provide Social Security with additional documentation.

Marriage, divorce or annulment: In addition to showing us a legal document proving your marriage, divorce or annulment, you must provide an identity document. That document must show your old name, as well as other identifying information or a recent photograph. (We can accept an expired document as evidence of your old name.)

Adoption, naturalization or other name change: In addition to showing us a legal document citing your new name, such as a court order, adoption decree or Certificate of Naturalization, you must provide us with two identity documents, including:

- One identity document in your old name (which can be expired); and
- One identity document in your new legal name, which must be current (unexpired).

Both of these documents must show identifying information or a recent photograph.

Citizenship: Also, if you are a U.S. citizen born outside the United States and our records do not show you are a citizen, you will need to provide proof of your U.S. citizenship. If you are not a U.S. citizen, Social Security will ask to see your current immigration documents.

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

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

If you are a worker age 25 and older and not receiving benefits, you receive a *Social Security Statement* every year that summarizes your earnings. Review this *Statement* to make sure that all your earnings are included. If your *Statement* does not include all your earnings, let your employer and your Social Security office know about any incorrect information.

What if my immigration status or citizenship changed?

If your immigration status changed or you became a U.S. citizen, you should tell Social Security so your records can be updated. To get your immigration status or citizenship corrected, you need to show documents that prove your new status or citizenship. Only certain documents can be accepted 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 are not 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 card or your child's card for free if it is lost or stolen. However, you are limited to three replacement cards in a year and 10 during your lifetime. Legal name changes and other exceptions do not 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 card, you will need to:

- Complete an *Application For A Social Security Card* (Form SS-5);

- Present a recently issued document to show your identity;
- Show evidence of your U.S. citizenship if you were born outside the United States and did not show proof of citizenship when you got your card; and
- Show evidence of your current lawful noncitizen status if you are not a U.S. citizen.

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

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. Do not 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 lost or stolen Social Security cards, or for corrected cards. 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; or
- 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 are asked for the number directly. If requested, you should ask:

- Why your number is needed;
- How your number will be used;
- What happens if you refuse; and
- 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. The decision is yours.

Contacting Social Security

For more information and to find copies of our publications, visit our website at www.socialsecurity.gov or call toll-free, **1-800-772-1213** (for the deaf or hard of hearing, call our TTY number, **1-800-325-0778**). We treat all calls confidentially. We can answer specific questions from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Friday. We can provide automated phone service 24 hours a day.

We also want to make sure you receive accurate and courteous service. That is why we have a second Social Security representative monitor some telephone calls.



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