



# Social Security

## Your Social Security Number and Card

[www.socialsecurity.gov](http://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 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, a U.S. passport, Certificate of Naturalization, or Certificate of Citizenship. If you aren't a U.S. citizen, Social Security will ask to see your current U.S. immigration documents. Acceptable documents 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; or
- 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).

**Age:** You need to present your birth certificate. (If one exists, you must submit it.) If a birth certificate doesn't exist, we may be able to accept your:

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

**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; or
- 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 number and card as soon as we have all of your information and have verified your documents with the issuing offices.

If you live in selected states or the District of Columbia, you may now be able to request a replacement card through the **my Social Security** portal at [www.socialsecurity.gov/myaccount](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/myaccount). Visit [www.socialsecurity.gov/ssnumber](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/ssnumber) for a list of participating states and other requirements. To get a **replacement** Social Security card, you must show us documents proving your identity. You must also show us documents proving your age and U.S. citizenship, if they're not already in our records.

## 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, please remember that these 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’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. If you are filing an application on behalf of someone else, you must show us evidence of your relationship to, or responsibility for, the person for whom you are filing. 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.

Anyone age 12 or older requesting an original Social Security number must appear in person for an interview, 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're working, also tell your employer. If you don't 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 document that proves 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 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'll accept an expired identity document in your old name.

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.



**Citizenship:** Also, if you're a U.S. citizen born outside the United States, and our records don't show you are a citizen, you'll need to provide proof of your U.S. citizenship. If you aren't 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. You must 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 isn't, give your employer the accurate information.

You also can check your earnings record on your *Social Security Statement*. The *Statement* is available online to workers age 18 and older. To review your *Statement*, go to [www.socialsecurity.gov/myaccount](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/myaccount) and create an account.

## 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 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're 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's lost or stolen. However, you're limited to three replacement cards in a year and 10 during your 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 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; and

- Show evidence of your current lawful noncitizen status if you aren't 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. 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 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're 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

Visit [www.socialsecurity.gov](http://www.socialsecurity.gov) anytime to apply for benefits, open a **my Social Security** account, find publications, and get answers to frequently asked questions. Or, call us toll-free at **1-800-772-1213** (for the deaf or hard of hearing, call our TTY number, **1-800-325-0778**). We can answer case-specific questions from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Friday. Generally, you'll have a shorter wait time if you call after Tuesday. We treat all calls confidentially. We also want to make sure you receive accurate and courteous service, so a second Social Security representative monitors some telephone calls. We can provide general information by automated phone service 24 hours a day. And, remember, our website, [www.socialsecurity.gov](http://www.socialsecurity.gov), is available to you anytime and anywhere!



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