



Plain Language Edition

How to Vote by Mail

Words to know

Absentee voting: Absentee voting is another name for when you mail in your vote for an election.

Ballot: A ballot is the piece of paper you use to vote.

Deadline: The deadline is the last day you can mail in your ballot and have it counted in the election.

Election office: An election office is a group of people who run the elections in your area.

Polling place: A polling place is where people can go to vote in person.

Voting by mail: Voting by mail is when you mail in your vote for an election. When you vote by mail, you do not need to go to a polling place to vote in person.

Witness: A witness is someone that watches while you fill out your ballot. Witnesses sign to say that you are the one that filled out your own ballot. A witness cannot tell you how to vote. They cannot look at your ballot. They should sign where it says witness.

How do I vote by mail?

This guide will teach you how to vote by mail. **Voting by mail** is when you mail in your vote for an election. This is also called **absentee voting**. When you vote by mail, you do not need to go to a polling place to vote in person. A **polling place** is where people can go to vote in person. Voting by mail means you can vote in an election and still stay home.

When you vote by mail, your state sends you a **ballot**. A ballot is the piece of paper you vote on. You mail your ballot back after you fill it out. In some states, there are also places you can drop off your ballot. You can vote by mail in every state. Some states have rules on how to vote by mail. In most states, you have to fill out a form to ask for a ballot.

In most states, anyone can vote by mail. In some states, you can only vote by mail if there is a reason you can't vote in person. Some reasons are moving out of state or having a disability that makes it hard to vote in person. You need a reason to vote by mail in these states: Indiana, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas.

You can look at the next part of this guide on how to vote by mail in your state. You can also check if you can vote by mail by looking at the website for your state **election office** [here](#). An election office is a group of people who run the elections in your area.

Some states will let you vote by mail if you are worried about COVID-19. Many people are still staying home as much as possible because of COVID-19. COVID-19 has been around for a few years now. We are still dealing with COVID-19. COVID-19 is still dangerous. We can keep doing things to stay safe from COVID-19.

You should continue to do the things you were doing before. Keep staying home if you can. Keep washing your hands. The safest way to vote is to vote by mail. If you vote in person you should wear a mask if you can. Masks protect us from COVID-19. COVID-19 spreads through the air. It spreads through tiny germs in the air. Masks filter the air you breathe. Masks can filter out the tiny COVID-19 germs. Masks can keep you from breathing in COVID-19 germs. You can learn more about masks and why it's important to wear them by reading our [fact sheet about masks](#).

Step 1: Check if you are registered to vote.

First, you need to [register to vote](#). You can register or check if you are registered to vote [here](#). If you are under guardianship and are not sure if you can vote, you can read more [here](#).

Sometimes you need to tell your state if you have done things before you can vote. You need to tell your state if you did things like moved, changed your name, became a citizen. You can learn about how to let them know [here](#).

Step 2: Ask for a mail-in ballot.

If you can vote by mail, you can ask for a mail-in ballot [here](#). In some states, the state government will send you a ballot, even if you don't ask. You can learn if your state sends everyone a ballot by looking at your state's page in our guide. You can also check with your state's election office.

Step 3: Check the deadlines.

It is important to make sure you know the **deadlines** for voting in your state. The deadline is the last day you can mail in your ballot and have it counted in the election. Some states will not count your ballot if you do not mail it in on time. In some states, you need to mail it on or before the date of the election. It's important to know the deadlines of your state election so the state counts your vote. You can find those deadlines [here](#).

Step 4: Fill out the ballot.

Soon after you ask for a ballot, you will get your ballot in the mail. Read the directions carefully. The directions will tell you how to fill out your ballot. Make sure to use a black or blue ink pen. If you need help learning more about the candidates on your ballot, look at [Ballotpedia](#).

Some states ask for **witnesses**. A witness is someone that watches while you fill out your ballot. Witnesses sign to say that you are the one that filled out your own ballot. Some states might ask you to include a copy of a document that proves who you are. This document could be your voter registration, your driver's license, your state identification card.

Read your state's rules very carefully. See our guide to find your state's rules. You need to sign your ballot. The directions will tell you where to sign. There will also be directions on how to seal your ballot. **Make sure you sign the ballot. Make sure you seal the ballot.** Read the directions about how to seal your ballot. For example, you might need to put your ballot in a special envelope before you mail it in.

Step 5: Mail (or drop off) the ballot.

After you seal the ballot you can drop it off in any United States Postal Service mailbox. In most states, you will need to add a stamp to your ballot. There are different places you can put your ballot to mail it in. You could put your ballot in your mailbox at your home. You could drop your ballot in a blue box marked USPS. Or you can take your ballot to your post office to mail it. In some states there are [special ballot boxes or other places](#) where you can drop off your ballot. **It is important to mail in your ballot as soon as possible.** This year it will take the US postal service longer to deliver mail. We want to make sure that everyone's vote is counted! **Congratulations! You have voted by mail.**

Common Questions about Voting By Mail

What do I do if I don't get my ballot?

Contact your state board of elections. Your state board of elections can send you another ballot. You can find out how to contact your state board of elections in the state guide.

How can I learn more about the candidates on the ballot?

Check out [Ballotpedia](#). If you enter your address, you can see what is on your ballot.

When is the latest I can turn in my ballot?

Different states have different deadlines to mail in your ballot. To learn your state's deadlines, check [this](#) out.

What happens if I vote for more than one candidate?

Your vote might not count if you vote for more than one candidate. Make sure you follow the directions on the ballot. If you accidentally vote for more than one candidate, do not turn in your ballot. Ask your state board of elections for a new ballot.

What happens if I skip questions on the ballot?

You do not have to vote for every election on the ballot. If you do not know how you want to vote or do not want to vote, that is okay. **You have to sign your ballot.** If you do not sign your ballot, the whole ballot will not be counted.

What do I do if I make a mistake on my ballot?

Call your state board of elections. If there is enough time, they can mail you another ballot. If there is not enough time, you can vote in-person or vote early.

Do I need to prove my identity when I vote?

Different states have different rules about proving who you are. To find out if you need to prove your identity in your state, **look for your state information in the rest of this guide.** Some states ask for witnesses. A witness is someone that watches while you fill out your ballot. Witnesses sign to say that you are the one that filled out your own ballot.

Some states might ask you to include a copy of a document that proves who you are. This document could be your voter registration, your driver's license, or your state identification card. **Read your state's rules very carefully.**

What are witnesses and do I need them?

Voters in some states must have a witness when they fill out their ballot.

A witness is someone that watches while you fill out your ballot.

Witnesses sign to say that you are the one that filled out your own ballot.

Not all states need witnesses.

You can find out if your state needs you to have a witness by looking at your state's rules in the next part of the guide.

You can also check the information on your ballot.

A witness is not allowed to tell you how to vote.

They are not supposed to look at your ballot.

What should I do if I am scared of getting sick or making my witness sick?

The witness can be socially distanced while you fill out the ballot.

This means the witness sits or stands six feet away or more. The witness could also watch through a window. The witness can wear a mask and gloves. The witness can also use a different pen. The witness can also use hand sanitizer or wash their hands with soap. By taking these steps, you can help stop the spread of germs.

If I received my ballot by mail, can I still vote in person?

In some states, you can vote in person **if you do not mail in your ballot**. In some states, you must give them your mail-in ballot to get an in-person ballot. In some states, you can turn in your mail-in ballot at your polling place. Check your state's rules to see if you can vote in person. In all states, **if you have mailed in your ballot, you cannot vote in person**. Voting twice is against the law.

What can I do if I am worried about mailing my ballot?

You can see if your state has [ballot boxes](#) or will let you drop off your ballot at a [polling place](#). You can call your state board of elections to check if your state has ballot boxes or a place to drop off your ballot. This year it will take the US postal service longer to deliver mail. Some people worry that their ballot may not arrive in time to be counted. You should mail in your ballot at least a week before Election Day. You want to make sure that there is plenty of time for your ballot to arrive. You should also ask for your mail-in ballot as soon as possible.

What are some mistakes people make when filling out their ballots?

Here is a [list](#) of mistakes people sometimes make when filling out the ballots and how to not do them.

What if I am in the military or an American living in another country?

You have special rules for how your ballot works. If you are in the military, you can find your rules [here](#). If you are an American living in another country, you can find your rules [here](#).