

REAL ID

2025 COMPLETE GUIDE

STEP-BY-STEP QUICK GUIDE



The Real ID Deadline
is May 7th, 2025.
Ensure You're Prepared!

**DEADLINE
APPROACHING**

REAL ID: Your Complete Guide to the May 7, 2025 Deadline

Don't let the REAL ID deadline catch you unprepared. This comprehensive guide provides everything you need to know about obtaining a REAL ID, with state-specific information to make the process as smooth as possible. Whether you're a frequent flyer or occasional traveler, understanding these new requirements now will save you headaches later.



What is a REAL ID?

A REAL ID is a form of identification that meets increased security standards established by the REAL ID Act of 2005. It's marked with a star in the upper portion of the card. These enhanced IDs are designed to reduce identity fraud and improve national security measures for travel and access to federal facilities.



Why You Need It

Starting May 7, 2025, you'll need a REAL ID-compliant license, passport, or another accepted ID to board domestic flights and enter certain federal facilities. Without a compliant ID, you'll be turned away at airport security checkpoints and federal buildings, even for domestic travel within the United States.



Required Documents

To obtain a REAL ID, you'll typically need proof of identity (birth certificate or passport), Social Security number (card or W-2), and two documents proving residency in your state (utility bills, bank statements, etc.). Married individuals whose names have changed may need additional documentation like marriage certificates.



Plan Ahead

Don't wait until the last minute. Processing times vary by state, and DMV appointments may be limited as the deadline approaches. Some states offer pre-verification options online, allowing you to upload documents before your in-person visit, which can significantly reduce your wait time.



Alternatives to REAL ID

If you don't want to get a REAL ID, acceptable alternatives include U.S. passports, passport cards, military IDs, and DHS Trusted Traveler cards (like Global Entry). These can be used instead of a REAL ID for federal purposes, including domestic air travel.



State Processing Times

Processing times for REAL ID applications vary significantly between states, ranging from same-day issuance to several weeks for delivery by mail. Check your state's DMV website for the most current information and allow plenty of time before you need to travel.

Key Statistics

2025

Enforcement Deadline

May 7, 2025 is the federal enforcement deadline for air travel and federal facility entry

56%

Compliance Rate

Percentage of Americans who had a REAL ID as of early 2025

\$20-\$60

Cost Range

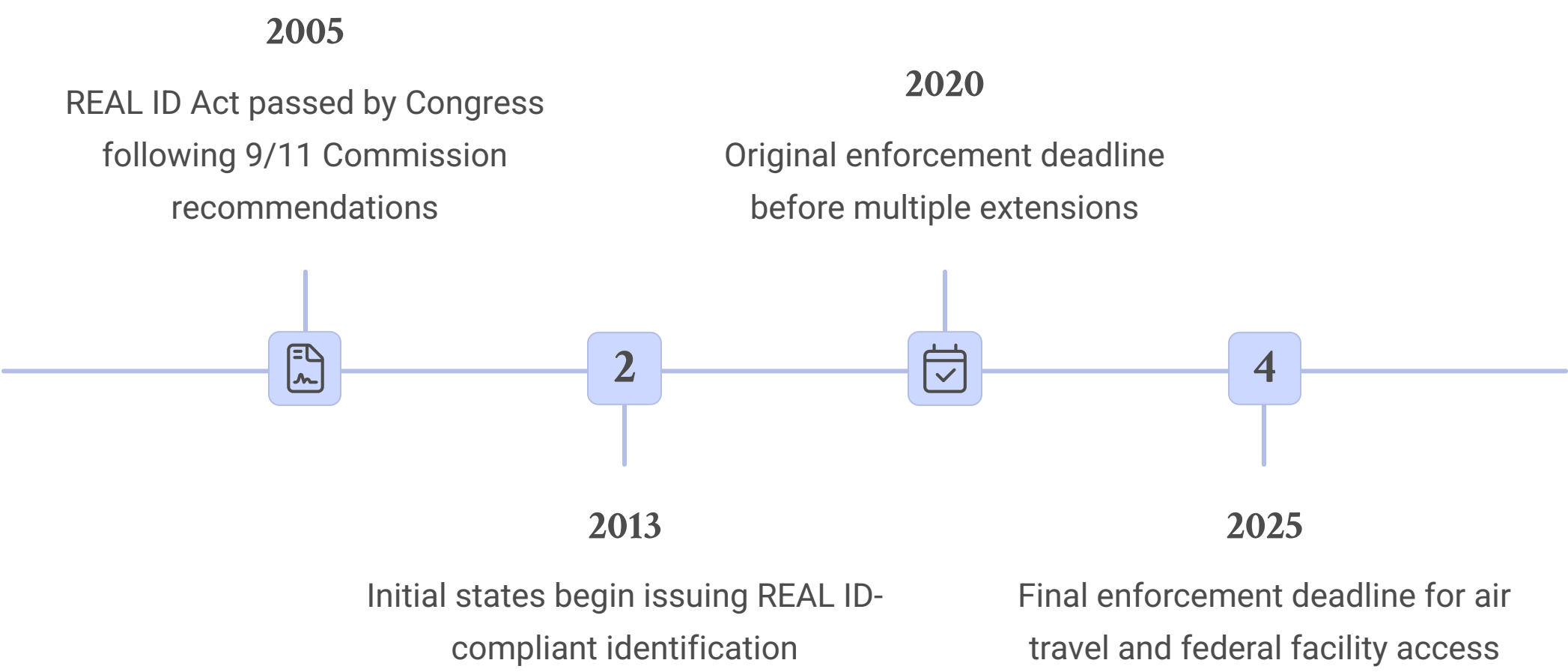
Typical cost range for REAL ID across states

3+

DMV Visits

Average number of attempts needed to complete the REAL ID application process

The REAL ID Act implementation has evolved over nearly two decades, with multiple deadline extensions due to implementation challenges and the COVID-19 pandemic:



Across states, there are over 50 different document combinations accepted as proof for obtaining a REAL ID license or identification card.

Impact on Travel and Security

Air Travel Statistics

- Over 2.9 million passengers fly domestically each day in the United States
- An estimated 44% of Americans will need to update their ID before the deadline
- TSA anticipates significant delays at security checkpoints immediately following enforcement

Federal Facility Access

- REAL ID affects entry to more than 2,300 federal buildings nationwide
- Military bases and nuclear power facilities require REAL ID for visitor access
- Federal courthouses may turn away citizens without compliant identification

DMV offices across the country report a 35% increase in REAL ID applications as the deadline approaches. Officials recommend applying at least six months before the deadline to avoid long wait times and processing delays. Early applicants typically experience wait times of 45 minutes, while those waiting until the final month before the deadline may face waits of 3+ hours.

Understanding REAL ID

What Is REAL ID?

The REAL ID Act, passed by Congress in 2005 following recommendations from the 9/11 Commission, establishes minimum security standards for state-issued driver's licenses, learner permits, and identification cards. The Act was created to enhance the security of identification documents used for official federal purposes.

Starting May 7, 2025, federal agencies, including TSA at airport security checkpoints, will only accept REAL ID-compliant licenses and identification cards (or other acceptable forms of identification) for domestic air travel and accessing certain federal facilities.

When You'll Need a REAL ID



Required For

- Boarding domestic flights within the United States
- Entering federal buildings that require identification
- Accessing military bases
- Entering nuclear power plants or other federal facilities



Not Required For

- Driving
- Voting
- Accessing hospitals or health clinics
- Visiting post offices
- Applying for or receiving federal benefits
- Participation in law enforcement proceedings

How to Identify a REAL ID

Most states mark REAL ID-compliant cards with a star in the upper portion of the card. Non-compliant cards are often marked with "Not for Federal Purposes." Enhanced Driver's Licenses (in Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Vermont, and Washington) may have a flag icon instead of a star but are equally acceptable and include benefits for land border crossings to Canada and Mexico.

Some states have automatically transitioned to issuing REAL ID-compliant cards. For example, Georgia has been issuing REAL ID-compliant licenses and ID cards since 2012, so many Georgia residents may already have compliant identification.



Acceptable Alternatives to REAL ID

If you prefer not to get a REAL ID, these federally approved identification documents will also be accepted:

Alternative ID	Description	Benefits	Limitations
U.S. Passport	Official international travel document	Valid for international travel; 10-year validity	More expensive (\$145+); longer processing time
U.S. Passport Card	Wallet-sized alternative to passport	Lower cost than passport (\$65); convenient size	Not valid for international air travel
DHS Trusted Traveler Cards	Global Entry, NEXUS, SENTRI, FAST	Expedited security screening; some include international benefits	Application fee; background check required
Enhanced Driver's License	Available only in MI, MN, NY, VT, WA	Serves as both REAL ID and border crossing card for Canada/Mexico	Limited state availability; slightly higher cost
U.S. Military ID	For active duty/retired military & dependents	No additional cost for service members	Only available to military personnel
Permanent Resident Card	For lawful permanent residents	Serves multiple identification purposes	Not available to U.S. citizens
Federally Recognized Tribal ID	Photo ID issued by federally recognized tribes	Acknowledges tribal sovereignty	Only available to tribal members
USCIS Employment Authorization	For non-citizens authorized to work	Serves multiple identification purposes	Temporary validity based on status

State-by-State Document Requirements

While specific requirements vary by state, all states follow a federal framework that requires documentation in these categories. Each state may accept different specific documents within these categories, so it's essential to check your state's DMV website for the most accurate information:



1. Proof of Identity & Legal Presence

One document from this category is typically required. Common acceptable documents include:

- Valid, unexpired U.S. passport or passport card
- Certified copy of U.S. birth certificate
- Consular Report of Birth Abroad
- Valid, unexpired Permanent Resident Card
- Foreign passport with approved I-94
- Unexpired Employment Authorization Document



2. Proof of Social Security Number

Most states require one document from this category:

- Social Security card (not laminated)
- W-2 form showing full SSN
- SSA-1099 form
- Non-SSA-1099 form
- Pay stub showing full SSN



3. Proof of Residency

Most states require two different documents showing your current address:

- Utility bill dated within 90 days
- Bank statement dated within 90 days
- Mortgage statement or lease agreement
- Insurance policy or bill
- Vehicle registration or title
- Tax document from within the last year



4. Proof of Name Change (if applicable)

Required if your current name differs from your identity document:

- Marriage certificate
- Divorce decree specifying name change
- Court order for legal name change
- Adoption papers

If you've undergone multiple legal name changes throughout your life, you may be required to provide documentation for each change to establish a clear legal trail of your identity. Some states, like Delaware, require that you first change your name with the Social Security Administration and wait 48 hours before visiting the DMV if your name has changed.

Important: All documents must be originals or certified copies. Photocopies, even notarized ones, will not be accepted. Name must be consistent across all documents or legal name change documentation must be provided. Many states require that your full name (including middle name) must exactly match the name on file with the Social Security Administration.

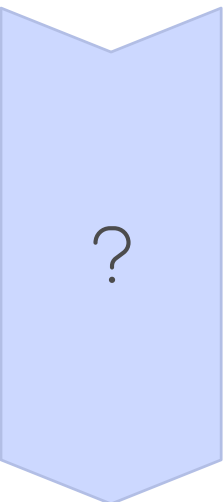
Key State Variations

While the core requirements are consistent, important state variations exist. Here are some examples:

State	Program Name	Special Requirements	Notes
Alabama	STAR ID	Must visit ALEA Driver License exam office (not license commissioners)	Known as "Secure, Trusted, and Reliable ID"
Alaska	REAL ID	Can be valid for up to 8 years	Accepts letter of ineligibility from SSA if no SSN
Arizona	Travel ID	Card is not required, only knowing SSN	Scheduling appointments recommended
Arkansas	REAL ID	Residency docs must be dated within last 6 months	Can upgrade at any revenue office
California	REAL ID	Pre-verification online available	P.O. Box users need physical address proof
Colorado	REAL ID	Full middle name must match SSA records exactly	Requires street address, not P.O. Box
Connecticut	REAL ID	Residency docs must be from last 90 days	SSN documentation no longer mandatory
Delaware	REAL ID	Name changes require 48-hour wait after SSA update	Must show physical address

For a complete list of state-specific requirements, visit your state's DMV website.

Step-by-Step Application Process



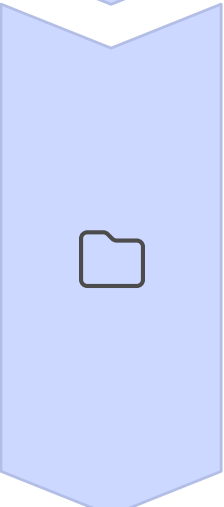
Determine if You Need a REAL ID

- Do you fly domestically?
- Do you regularly visit federal facilities?
- Do you already have an acceptable alternative ID like a passport?



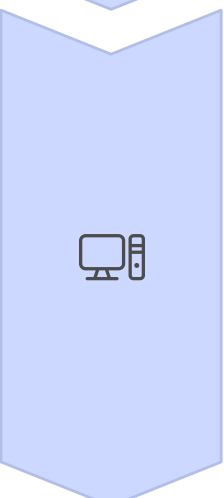
Check Your State Requirements

- Visit your state's DMV website
- Use their document verification tool if available
- Note any state-specific variations in requirements



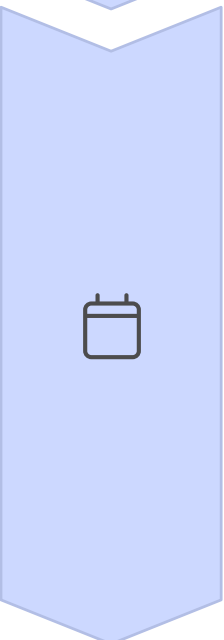
Gather Required Documents

- Proof of identity and legal presence
- Social Security number verification
- Two proofs of residence
- Name change documentation if applicable



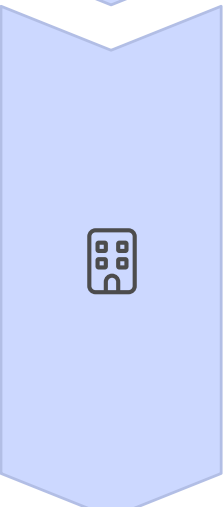
Pre-Verification (if available)

- Many states offer online document pre-verification
- Upload or enter document information
- Receive confirmation before your visit



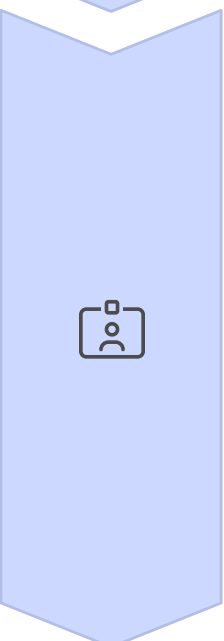
Schedule an Appointment

- Most DMVs accept walk-ins but wait times can be lengthy
- Schedule an appointment online when possible
- Choose less busy times (mid-week, mid-month)



Visit Your DMV

- Bring all original documents
- Complete application form
- Pay the required fee
- Have a new photo taken



Receive Your REAL ID

- Some states issue temporary IDs immediately
- Permanent card typically arrives by mail in 1-3 weeks
- Verify the star marking is present on your new ID



Timeline & Costs

Understanding the timeline and costs associated with obtaining a REAL ID will help you plan accordingly. Most states have streamlined their processes, but timing and fees can vary significantly based on your location and specific situation.

Processing Timeline



Same-day issuance

Most states provide temporary cards on the same day of application. This temporary card is valid for identification purposes until your permanent card arrives.



Permanent card delivery

Typically arrives by mail within 1-3 weeks in most states. Some rural areas or during peak processing times may experience longer delays of up to 4 weeks.



Appointment wait times

Varies from same-day to several weeks depending on location and time of year. Urban DMV locations and periods near the deadline tend to have longer wait times.

As the May 2025 deadline approaches, expect increased wait times for both appointments and card processing. Planning your application at least 3-6 months before you need to use your REAL ID is strongly recommended.

Cost Breakdown

REAL ID costs vary by state and situation. The following table provides an overview of typical fees you might encounter:

Type of Transaction	Typical Cost Range	Notes
New REAL ID license	\$25-\$60	Varies by state
License renewal with REAL ID upgrade	\$20-\$45	Some states waive upgrade fee at regular renewal
Duplicate license with REAL ID upgrade	\$15-\$40	For mid-cycle upgrades
REAL ID state identification card	\$10-\$35	Typically cheaper than driver's licenses
Enhanced Driver's License (where available)	\$30-\$85	More expensive than standard REAL ID

Additional costs to consider include:

- Document acquisition fees (birth certificates, marriage licenses, etc.)
- Transportation costs to and from the DMV
- Potential lost wages for time taken off work

Check with your state's DMV for the most current fee schedule as prices may change before the 2025 deadline.

Special Situations

Minors Under 18

Children under 18 traveling with an adult companion do not need a REAL ID. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) does not typically require children under the age of 18 to provide identification when traveling domestically with a companion who has acceptable identification.

Military Personnel

Active duty U.S. military members can use their military ID for domestic air travel. Family members still need REAL ID or an acceptable alternative if they're traveling without the service member. Department of Defense IDs (including those issued to dependents) are acceptable alternatives to REAL ID.

Name Changes

If your name has changed multiple times (through marriage, divorce, etc.), you may need to provide documentation showing the complete chain of name changes from your identity document to your current legal name. Some states require you to update your name with the Social Security Administration before visiting the DMV for a REAL ID with your new name.

U.S. Territories

Residents of U.S. territories should check with their local licensing authority, as implementation of REAL ID may vary. Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) have their own REAL ID requirements and implementation procedures.

TSA PreCheck

Having TSA PreCheck does NOT eliminate the need for a REAL ID or other acceptable identification after May 7, 2025. PreCheck expedites the screening process but doesn't replace identification requirements. You will still need to present a REAL ID or acceptable alternative regardless of your PreCheck status.

Foreign Nationals

Non-U.S. citizens must provide documentation of their lawful status in the United States. Acceptable documents vary by state but typically include permanent resident cards, valid foreign passports with approved visa and I-94, or Employment Authorization Documents. Some states have special procedures for temporary visitors.

Common Mistakes to Avoid



Bringing Photocopies

All documents must be originals or certified copies. Regular photocopies, even if notarized, will be rejected. DMV officials cannot make exceptions to this rule, and you'll need to reschedule your appointment if you bring improper documentation.



Insufficient Name Change Documentation

If your current name differs from your identity document, you must provide legal documentation for each name change. This means bringing marriage certificates, divorce decrees, or court orders that form a complete chain of all name changes throughout your history.



Mismatched Names

Names must be consistent across all documents or have proper documentation explaining differences. Even minor discrepancies like using a middle initial on some documents but the full middle name on others can cause problems during the verification process.



Only One Proof of Residence

Most states require two separate documents proving your residence address. These typically must be from different sources (not two bank statements, for example) and must show your full name and complete current address, including apartment or unit numbers.



Expired Documents

Most states require that identity documents be unexpired (check your state's specific requirements). Even if your document expired recently or has a grace period for other purposes, it likely won't be accepted for REAL ID applications, so plan ahead to renew critical documents.



Laminated Social Security Cards

Many states will not accept laminated Social Security cards as proof of SSN. If your card is laminated, you may need to request a replacement from the Social Security Administration, which can take 7-14 days to arrive, so plan accordingly.

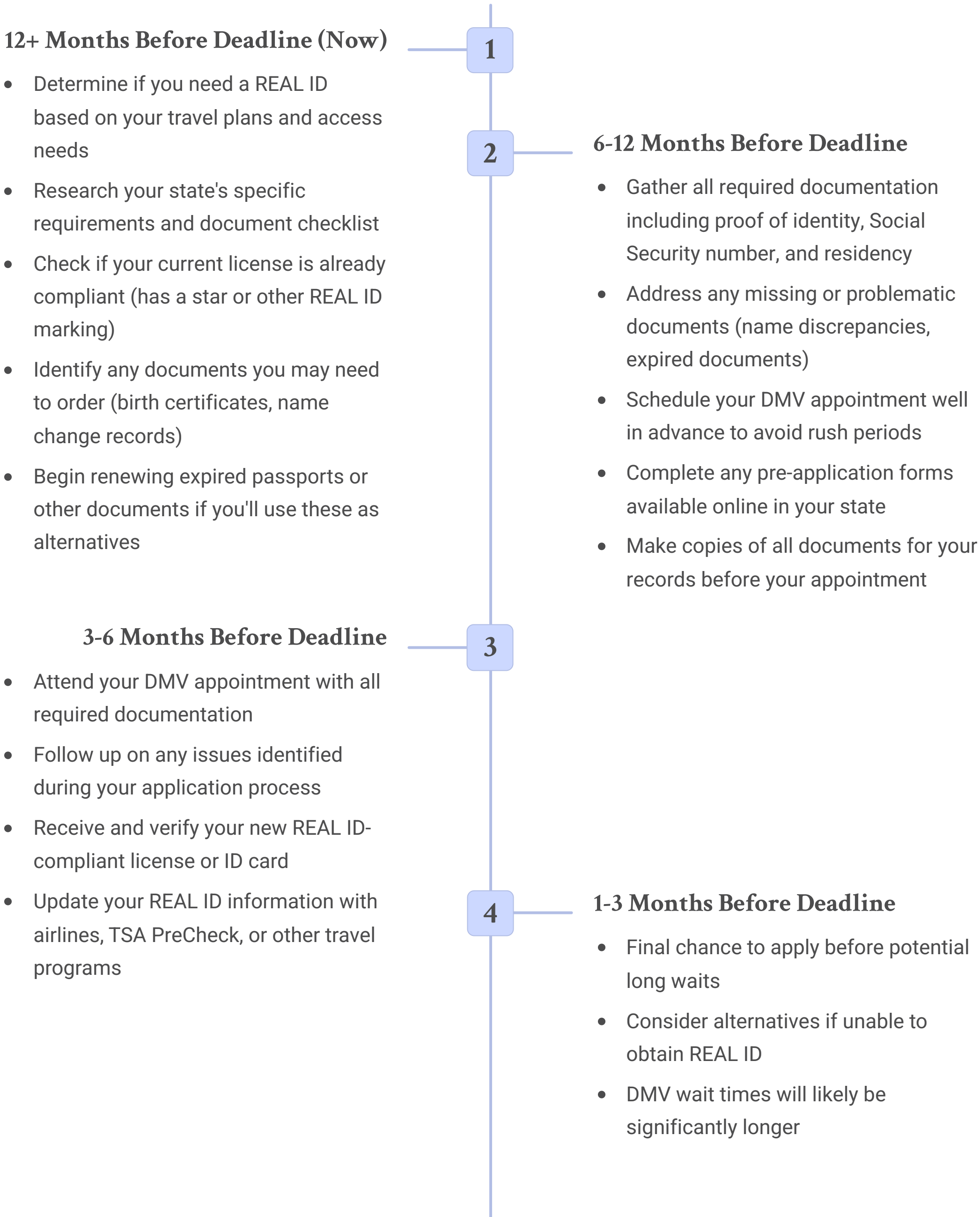


Waiting Until the Last Minute

DMV offices will experience significant volume as the deadline approaches. Wait times could extend to weeks or even months for appointments in some locations. Starting early gives you time to address any document issues that might arise during your application process.

Planning Timeline: Early Preparation

Starting early provides flexibility to address unexpected document issues and avoids the stress of last-minute applications. Most states recommend applying at least 3-6 months before you'll need to use your REAL ID for travel or facility access.



Important Contacts and Resources



Department of Homeland Security

REAL ID Information:

dhs.gov/real-id

REAL ID FAQs: dhs.gov/real-id/real-id-faqs



Transportation Security Administration

Identification Requirements:

tsa.gov/travel/security-screening/identification

TSA PreCheck and REAL ID:

tsa.gov/precheck/required-identification



United States Government

Official Government Information:

usa.gov/real-id

Finding Your State DMV

Each state has its own DMV website with specific REAL ID information. To find the official REAL ID information for your state:

How to Find Your State's Information

1. Search online for "[Your State Name] DMV REAL ID"
2. Look for official .gov websites in the results
3. Verify the website belongs to your state's official DMV or equivalent agency

State Resources Available

- Online document verification guides (DC, California, Alaska)
- Interactive checklists to determine exactly what documents you need
- Pre-verification systems to upload documents before your visit
- Mobile apps for document submission (Florida has Florida Smart ID)
- Document wizards that ask questions to determine your specific requirements

You can also use the DHS REAL ID State Lookup tool at <https://www.dhs.gov/real-id> to be directed to your state's official REAL ID information page.

Action Checklist

Determine Your Needs

Assess if you need a REAL ID based on your travel and access requirements

Check Requirements

Review your state's specific REAL ID requirements on their DMV website

Gather Documents

Collect all required original documents: proof of identity and legal presence, Social Security number verification, two proofs of residence, and name change documentation (if applicable)

Schedule & Visit

Make a DMV appointment (if your state offers this option) and visit with all required documents

Verify Compliance

Confirm the REAL ID star marking is on your new license or ID card, or ensure you have an acceptable alternative ID

Remember: Taking action early is the best way to avoid long wait times and ensure you're prepared for the May 7, 2025 deadline. Don't wait until the last minute – the closer to the deadline, the longer the wait times will be at DMV offices nationwide.

This guide was last updated on March 2025. For the most current information, always check your state's DMV website or visit dhs.gov/real-id.

The information in this guide is based on research from authoritative sources including the Department of Homeland Security, Transportation Security Administration, and official state DMV websites. The REAL ID Act has been subject to multiple deadline extensions over the years, but the May 7, 2025 enforcement date is considered final with no further extensions expected.