



real id – does one really need it?

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What is the REAL ID Act, and when does it go into effect?

The REAL ID Act establishes minimum security standards for licenses and prevents federal agencies from accepting licenses and identification cards from states that do not meet the set standards. Enforcement of the REAL ID Act begins **May 7, 2025**, at which point federal agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Transportation Security Administration (TSA) will begin to accept either REAL ID-compliant identification or Enhanced Driver's Licenses (EDL) issued by some states, including Washington, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, and Vermont, amongst other alternative forms of identification (please see "Will a REAL ID be needed for travel" below).

How does one apply for a REAL ID?

REAL ID requirements vary by state. At a minimum, applicants will typically need to prepare documentation with one's name, date of birth, social security number, address, and lawful immigration status.

Lawful permanent residents and those with temporary legal status may generally also be eligible to apply for and receive a REAL ID, including recipients of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) or Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and holders of valid student or employment visas. Please note that, for those with temporary status, the REAL ID will likely be issued with an expiration date matching the expiration of legal status. These cards will require renewal in-person, and they may also be marked as temporary or limited-term. Some of these procedures may change as the deadline for compliance nears. If an individual has a change in immigration status, such as after adjusting to lawful permanent resident status, an application for a regular, full-term REAL ID will need to be submitted, indicating the new US immigration status.

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Will a REAL ID be needed for travel?

For domestic travel, the TSA will accept a REAL ID OR alternatives, including U.S. and foreign passports, U.S. passport cards, permanent resident cards, border crossing cards, Canadian provincial driver's licenses or Indian and Northern Affairs Canada cards, and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Employment Authorization Cards (I-766). Travelers may continue to use foreign passports for travel within the United States even after May 7, 2025. Lawful permanent residents must still remember to have their permanent resident card in their possession at all times. It is also recommended that non-U.S. citizens and residents carry any applicable maintenance of status documents, such as an Employment Authorization Document (EAD), Form I-797 approval notice, Form I-797 receipt notice for a change/extension of status, etc.

For international travel, including border crossings into Canada and Mexico and international sea cruises, travelers must use acceptable forms of identification, such as a U.S. or foreign passport, and may not rely on only a REAL ID for travel. Travelers who are non-U.S. citizens should also remember to bring the necessary documentation, such as a permanent resident card or a Form I-797 approval notice, in preparation for reentry to the United States after international travel.

MSK Analysis

Obtaining a REAL ID is strongly recommended for ease of domestic travel. Travelers should still carry with them proof of their legal status in the United States, if applicable.

Anyone who has renewed their state license or identification card in the last two years should check the upper portion of the license or card to ascertain whether there is a star marking indicating that it already has the markings of a REAL ID. It is permissible and recommended to begin the driver license renewal process six months before the expiration date of the current license or state identification card. When renewing, it is important to provide the documentation required by the particular state of residence in order to receive a REAL ID.