

# FAQ: What Documents Are Non-Citizens Required by Law to Carry While in the U.S.?

**NOTE!** This information is intended as a quick reference for general purposes. **It is not comprehensive and should not be considered legal advice.** Consult a personal immigration attorney for case-specific legal advice.

## Legal Requirement

- **Carry Proof of Status.** U.S. law requires noncitizens to carry proof of legal status at all times.
- **Report Change of Address.** Additionally, noncitizens living in the U.S. must report a change of address every time they move - within 10 days.

## Generally Acceptable Documents

(A) Green card OR (B) EAD card OR (C) Combination of:



Form I-551 (2017 version)



Form I-766 (2017 version)

**NOTE!** If you have a valid (unexpired) Green Card or EAD card, you should need no additional documentation.

1. **Government-issued photo ID, such as a passport**  
+
2. **Form I-94** for most recent entry  
+
3. **Status-specific documentation** (varies; see below)

A screenshot of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Form I-94, Arrival/Departure Record. It shows fields for family name, first name, birth date, passport number, and date of entry.

## Government-Issued Photo ID

Noncitizens who do not have a green card or EAD card should carry a valid (unexpired) government-issued photo ID containing name, photo, date of birth, and expiration date, such as:

- **Passport** (Note: Because non-U.S. IDs may result in confusion in some cases, you may want to consider applying for a U.S. state-issued ID or REAL ID where possible.)
- **REAL ID** or **Maine-Issued ID**

## Form I-94 Arrival Record

For each U.S. entry, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) electronically issues a new Form I-94, which is proof of lawful admission. Every time you travel, [obtain and verify Form I-94](#). If necessary, contact CBP for immediate correction of any errors to avoid problems when traveling or stopped.

## Status-Specific Documentation

Noncitizens who do not have a green card or EAD card should carry (1) a government-issued photo ID, (2) form I-94 for their most recent entry, **AND** (3) additional documentation according to their status:

- **F-1 Students:** Form I-20 (signed)
- **J-1 Scholars and Exchange Visitors:** Form DS-2019 (signed)
- **H-1B Professionals:** Form I-797
- **All other noncitizens** should carry any status-specific documentation where applicable. See FAQ for more information. If unsure, consider [consulting a personal immigration attorney](#) for guidance.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Is the requirement for noncitizens to carry proof of "registration" or legal status new?

No, the legal requirement has existed for decades by statute and regulation. However, on January 20, 2025 President Trump issued an executive order ("[Protecting the American People Against Invasion](#)") signaling that the federal government's intent to enforce the requirement more strictly with more severe penalties.

### What is the full list of documents that serve as proof of registration?

See [this resource from NAFSA](#) for full list of "[registration processing forms](#)" and "[evidence of registration.](#)"

### Who does this apply to?

- The legal requirement **to register** applies to all noncitizens 14 and older not previously registered and fingerprinted when applying for a U.S. visa.
- The legal requirement **to carry proof of registration** applies to all noncitizens 18 and older.

### How do I know if I am registered already?

Most persons who have obtained a valid visa from the Department of State and were lawfully admitted to the U.S. have already registered. For more information, see this article from USCIS under "[How to Determine if You are Already Registered?](#)".

### What should I do if I am not already registered?

If you are concerned that you may not already be registered, you may consider [consulting a personal immigration attorney](#) for guidance on the appropriate process.

### When do I need to carry or have access to my documents?

**Always.** The requirement applies not only when traveling but also when going about daily life.

### What could happen if I am stopped without my documents?

- Consequences may vary depending on your circumstances. You could be charged with a misdemeanor, be required to pay a fine, be detained, deported, and barred from future immigration to the U.S.

### Do I always need originals? Are copies OK?

- **When traveling** original documents are typically required.
- **For everyday situations**, you may not be comfortable carrying your official passport and other documentation that is difficult or impossible to replace. In these situations, it may be appropriate to carry paper copies of at least your passport and Form I-94 in your wallet or purse and electronic copies of any additional documents. You may want to make a set of copies to keep in several locations (if secure) for backup like in your backpack, in your locker, or to share with a trusted contact.

### What about electronic copies?

- **Stay organized and save locally.** If you carry electronic copies on a mobile device, make sure these are easily and quickly accessible in a single folder and saved to your device locally in case you are in a situation where you do not have access to the internet.
- **Have a backup plan when your phone dies.** Consider what you will do if your device dies or is lost, and you are unable to access copies or the originals.

### What if one or several of my documents are expired?

- **Stay up to date.** Make sure to apply for any renewal documents with as much advance notice as possible to minimize any period when you do not have valid documents. (Note: a visa stamp found in your passport is an entry document, it does not provide proof of status and you are allowed to remain in the U.S. after the visa expires. Further, it is **not recommended** that you travel for the sole purpose of renewing your visa stamp.)
- **Keep the renewal receipts.** If expiration is unavoidable, carry copies of the expired documents and any official receipt notices for pending renewal application. If unable to renew, contact a personal immigration attorney as soon as possible for specific guidance.

### What if one or several of my documents are missing?

- **Replace immediately.** Take the necessary action to replace missing documents as soon as possible.
- **Keep the replacement receipts.** If lost, carry copies of the original lost document and a copy of the application for replacement. If unable to replace, contact a personal immigration attorney as soon as possible for specific guidance.

### What else should I do as a precaution?

- **Stay organized.** Keep original documents organized in a single, secure location for quick access. Keep them in the same place and do not move them frequently. You may also want to make and keep copies of these documents in several secure locations for quick, convenient access by you and/or a trusted contact as needed.
- **Have a trusted contact.** Make sure you have a friend, family member, attorney, or trusted contact who can access your documents on your behalf in the event you are unable to obtain them. Memorize their phone number or have a way to contact them if necessary.
- **Make a plan.** Make a plan with your trusted contact on what to do and who to call in this situation, which may include friends, family, and/or your attorney if necessary.

### What should I do if I have further questions?

Consider [consulting a personal immigration attorney](#) for case-specific legal advice according to your situation. Immigration in the U.S. can be complicated and unforgiving. It is important to make sure you are taking the necessary steps to comply with the law according to your specific circumstances.

## Useful Links & Additional Sources

### U.S. Government Immigration & Related Links

*U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)*

- Alien Registration Requirement: <https://www.uscis.gov/alienregistration>

*U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP)*

- Obtain I-94: <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/home>
- Request an I-94 Correction: [https://www.help.cbp.gov/s/questions?language=en\\_US](https://www.help.cbp.gov/s/questions?language=en_US)

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)*

- Form M396: Selected U.S. Travel and Identity Documents:  
[https://www.ice.gov/doclib/foia/policy/guideHSI\\_SelectedUSTravelIdentityDocs\\_FormM396\\_02.2018.pdf](https://www.ice.gov/doclib/foia/policy/guideHSI_SelectedUSTravelIdentityDocs_FormM396_02.2018.pdf)

*USA.gov*

- How to Get a REAL ID: <https://www.usa.gov/real-id>

### Additional Links and Resources

Know your Rights

- *American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)*
  - What to Do If Stopped: <https://www.aclu.org/know-your-rights/immigrants-rights>
- *Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project: <https://ilapmaine.org/know-your-rights>*

*American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA)*

- Immigration Lawyer Search: <https://www.ailalawyer.com/>
- Practice Alert: DHS to Publish the Alien Registration Form and Evidence of Registration Interim Final Rule: <https://www.aila.org/library/practice-alert-dhs-to-publish-the-alien-registration-form-and-evidence-of-registration-interim-final-rule>

*NAFSA: Association of International Educators (NAFSA)*

- Requirements to Carry Immigration Registration Document and Report Change of Address: <https://www.nafsa.org/professional-resources/browse-by-interest/requirements-carry-immigration-registration-document-and-report-change>

### Bates College Center for Global Education

- Travel for Current F-1 Students: <https://www.bates.edu/global-education/travel-for-current-f-1-students/>
- Maintaining Your F-1 Status: <https://www.bates.edu/global-education/incoming-students/maintaining-your-f-1-status/>