



CALIFORNIA SECRETARY OF STATE

## Vote-by-Mail Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### Who can vote by mail?

All active registered voters in California will receive a vote-by-mail ballot and a postage-paid ballot return envelope in the mail from their county elections official. Any registered voter may vote using a vote-by-mail ballot instead of going to the polls on Election Day.

### How do I vote by mail?

- ✓ **Complete it:** Mark your choices on your vote-by-mail ballot.
- ✓ **Seal it:** Secure your voted ballot inside the vote-by-mail ballot return envelope you received from your county elections office.
- ✓ **Sign it:** Sign and date the outside of your vote-by-mail ballot return envelope. Make sure your signature matches the one on your CA driver's license/state ID or the one you provided when registering to vote. Your county elections office will compare them before they count your ballot.

### How can I return my vote-by-mail ballot?

- **By Drop Box:** Drop off your completed vote-by-mail ballot at a secure drop box or drop-off location within the state or the office of your county elections official by the close of polls at 8:00 p.m. on Election Day.
- **By Mail:** Drop off your completed vote-by-mail ballot at a USPS collection box. Vote-by-mail ballots that are mailed must be postmarked on or before Election Day and received by your county elections office no later than 7 days after Election Day. Be sure to check the pick-up time on the USPS collection box; if the last collection time has passed, your envelope will not be postmarked until the following day.
- **In Person:** Drop off your completed vote-by-mail ballot at any polling place, vote center, or county elections office by the close of polls at 8:00 p.m. on Election Day.

### When should I mail my vote-by-mail ballot?

Your vote-by-mail ballot must be mailed or dropped off at a secure drop box, drop-off location, polling place, vote center, or county elections office by the close of polls at 8:00 p.m. on Election Day. Ballots mailed through USPS must be postmarked by Election Day and received by your county elections official no later than 7 days after Election Day.

### **What if I am unable to personally return by vote-by-mail ballot?**

You can authorize someone to return your vote-by-mail ballot on your behalf; just be sure to fill out the authorization section found on the outside of your vote-by-mail ballot envelope. Anyone may return your ballot for you, as long as they do not get paid on a per ballot basis.

### **When must my vote-by-mail ballot be received?**

Vote-by-mail ballots must be postmarked on or before 8:00 p.m. on Election Day and received by a voter's county elections office up to 7 days after Election Day. The Secretary of State recommends returning your vote-by-mail ballot as soon as possible and signing up for ballot tracking at [WheresMyBallot.sos.ca.gov](https://WheresMyBallot.sos.ca.gov) to receive automatic notifications when your ballot was received and counted or if there are any issues with your ballot so they can be corrected.

### **Do vote-by-mail ballots need stamps?**

No, all vote-by-mail ballots in California come with a First Class, prepaid postage return envelope.

### **How can I ensure my county elections office received my vote-by-mail ballot?**

The Secretary of State's "Where's My Ballot?" tracking tool is available to all California voters. Voters can sign up to receive automatic notifications by text message, email, or voice call on the status of their vote-by-mail ballot at [WheresMyBallot.sos.ca.gov](https://WheresMyBallot.sos.ca.gov). You will receive a notification when your ballot has been mailed to you, when your ballot is received by your county elections office, and when your ballot has been counted. In addition, if there are any issues with your ballot, you will be notified with instructions on how to correct them to make sure your vote is counted.

### **What are elections officials and the USPS doing to ensure ballots are delivered timely?**

All active registered voters in California will receive a vote-by-mail ballot and a First Class, postage-paid ballot return envelope in the mail from their county elections official. County elections officials use the postal service's Official Election Mail Logo on vote-by-mail ballot envelopes to allow postal workers and carriers to recognize it as essential election mail.

County elections officials work closely with the USPS to review and approve the design of vote-by-mail envelopes and other election mail pieces to ensure machine compatibility and the seamless delivery and return of ballots.

California elections officials have weekly meetings with USPS representatives to ensure the timely delivery and return of vote-by-mail ballots. If issues with mail service are identified, we contact USPS immediately. We have spent years establishing relationships and regular communication with local and state postal representatives to prepare for elections.

USPS has established extraordinary measures to ensure that election mail is handled appropriately and timely delivered. The extraordinary measures include, but are not limited to, expedited handling, extra deliveries, and special pickups to expedite delivery of ballots to voters and voted ballots back to elections officials.

Our USPS partners communicate with each mail facility throughout the state regarding the vote-by-mail period and provide examples of what local vote-by-mail ballot envelopes look like to ensure that they are given priority and processed timely.

USPS also conduct daily sweeps of processing areas and require staff to certify no unprocessed ballot mail remains at postal facilities.

**Are ballots placed in drop boxes secure?**

Yes. Ballot drop boxes are secure, locked boxes that are clearly marked as an “Official Ballot Drop Box.” Ballot drop boxes are monitored and ballots are regularly collected by two authorized county employees. Ballots are placed in a sealable or lockable container for secure transport back to the county elections office. You can track your dropped off ballot by signing up for [WheresMyBallot.sos.ca.gov](https://WheresMyBallot.sos.ca.gov) to receive automatic notifications when your ballot was received and counted or if there are any issues with your ballot so they can be corrected.

**What if I forgot to sign my vote-by-mail ballot return envelope?**

If you forgot to sign your vote-by-mail ballot return envelope, your county elections official will notify you by mail, phone, email, or through the Where’s My Ballot? ballot tracking tool (to sign up to receive automatic notifications when your ballot was mailed, received, counted, or if there are any issues with your ballot so they can be corrected, go to [WheresMyBallot.sos.ca.gov](https://WheresMyBallot.sos.ca.gov)). Your county elections office will provide you with a form to fill out and return to them in order for your ballot to be counted. The form must be provided to your county elections office two days prior to the day your county certifies the election, so be sure to fill it out and return it to your county election office right away.

**How do I know my vote will be counted?**

Vote-by-mail ballots must be postmarked on or before 8:00 p.m. on Election Day and received by a voter’s county elections office up to 7 days after Election Day. Voters can sign-up for ballot tracking at [WheresMyBallot.sos.ca.gov](https://WheresMyBallot.sos.ca.gov) to receive automatic notifications by email, text message, or voice call when their ballot has been received and counted, or if there are any issues with their ballot so they can be corrected. Additionally, the status of your ballot will be uploaded to [VoterStatus.sos.ca.gov](https://VoterStatus.sos.ca.gov) within 60 days of the election.