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U.S. Department of  
Homeland Security

# REAL ID Frequently Asked Questions for the Public

The following are frequently asked questions about the REAL ID program that would be useful to the public.

## REAL ID



## Q: What is REAL ID? (#)

Passed by Congress in 2005, the REAL ID Act enacted the 9/11 Commission's recommendation that the Federal Government “set standards for the issuance of sources of identification, such as driver's licenses.” The Act established minimum security standards for state-issued driver's licenses and identification cards and prohibits Federal agencies from accepting for official purposes licenses and identification cards from states that do not meet these standards. States have made considerable progress in meeting this key recommendation of the 9/11 Commission and every state has a more secure driver's license today than before the passage of the Act.

## Q: What do I need to do if I am visiting a federal facility or a military base? (#)

Residents from a state/territory that is compliant with REAL ID or non-compliant with REAL ID, but has received an extension may continue to use their current state/territory-issued driver's licenses and identification cards, regardless of whether the card is REAL ID compliant or not, for accessing federal facilities, including military bases. This is what we call “state-based” enforcement. Only the state that issued the resident's license/ID must be either compliant or have been granted an extension in order for that resident to use that license/ID for accessing Federal facilities. The license/ID itself does not have to be REAL ID compliant until “card-based” enforcement begins on October 1, 2020.

Starting February 5, 2018, residents of American Samoa, which is not compliant with REAL ID and was not granted an extension, will no longer be allowed to use their American Samoa-issued driver's licenses and identification cards to access federal facilities (including military bases), enter nuclear power plants or board commercial aircraft. As noted above, this is what we call "state-based" enforcement. American Samoa residents will need to show an alternative form of identification that is acceptable to the facility. Visitors should contact the facility to determine what, if any, identification is needed for access.

Fifty-five out of fifty-six states and territories are currently compliant with REAL ID or non-compliant with an extension. The residents from these states and territories may continue using their driver's licenses or identification cards, regardless of whether the license/ID is REAL ID compliant or not, for accessing Federal facilities (including military bases), entering nuclear power plants, and boarding commercial aircraft. The February 5, 2018, enforcement date only applies currently to the residents of American Samoa.

Starting October 1, 2020, every state and territory resident will need to present a REAL ID compliant license/ID, or another acceptable form of identification, for accessing Federal facilities, entering nuclear power plants, and boarding commercial aircraft. This is what we call "card-based" enforcement. The card, itself, must be REAL ID compliant unless the resident is using an alternative acceptable document such as a passport.

## Q: For American Samoans starting February 5, 2018: What if you do not have acceptable ID to board your plane? (#)

Beginning February 5, 2018 American Samoans will not be permitted to use American Samoan-issued driver's licenses and IDs to board commercial aircraft. However, to provide a smooth transition, from February 5th through May 6, 2018, TSA will provide additional assistance for American Samoans that arrive at the airport without acceptable identification, such as a passport.

In this case, you may be asked to present at least two other forms of ID, such as:

- American Samoa Certificate of Identity
- Birth certificate
- Social security card
- Voter registration card

- Vehicle registration
- Marriage certificate
- W-2 form
- Credit card

These alternative forms of ID must have your name and other identifying information such as photo, address, phone number, social security number, or date of birth. If your identity is confirmed, you may be subject to additional screening before you will be allowed to enter the screening checkpoint.

You will not be allowed to enter the security checkpoint if your identity cannot be confirmed, you choose to not provide proper identification, or you decline to cooperate with the identity verification process.

## Q: Will a federal agency accept my Enhanced Driver's License? (#)

Yes. State Enhanced Driver's Licenses (EDLs) designated as acceptable border-crossing documents by DHS under the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative are acceptable for official federal purposes such as accessing a Federal facility or boarding a commercial aircraft. Individual agency policies may still apply.

Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Vermont, and Washington are the only states that currently issue EDLs. For more information on EDLs, please go to [www.dhs.gov/enhanced-drivers-licenses-what-are-they](https://www.dhs.gov/enhanced-drivers-licenses-what-are-they) (<https://www.dhs.gov/enhanced-drivers-licenses-what-are-they>).

## Q: REAL ID does NOT apply to the following: (#)

- Entering Federal facilities that do not require a person to present identification
- Voting or registering to vote
- Applying for or receiving Federal benefits
- Being licensed by a state to drive
- Accessing Health or life preserving services (including hospitals and health clinics), law enforcement, or constitutionally protected activities (including a defendant's

access to court proceedings)

- Participating in law enforcement proceedings or investigations

## Q: Why is DHS implementing air travel in stages? (#)

**Starting January 22, 2018**, passengers with a driver's license issued by a state that is still not compliant with the REAL ID Act (and has not been granted an extension) will need to show an alternative form of acceptable identification for domestic air travel to board their flight. [To check whether your state is compliant or has an extension, click here \(/current-status-states-territories\)](#). Passengers with driver's licenses issued by a state that is compliant with REAL ID (or a state that has been issued an extension) will still be able to use their driver's licenses or identification cards.

\*American Samoa is subject to REAL ID enforcement as of February 5, 2018.

## Q: When will I need to change how I travel domestically? (#)

**Starting January 22, 2018**, passengers who have driver's licenses issued by a state that is not yet compliant with REAL ID and that has not received an extension will need to show an alternative form of acceptable identification for domestic air travel. Please see TSA's website for a list of acceptable forms of identification. Passengers who have licenses issued by a state that is compliant or that has an extension to become compliant with REAL ID requirements may continue to use their licenses as usual. For a list of states already in compliance or with an extension visit DHS's REAL ID webpage. DHS continually updates this list as more states come into compliance or obtain extensions.

\*American Samoa is subject to REAL ID enforcement as of February 5, 2018.

## Q: Will minors need to have driver's licenses to fly domestically? (#)

TSA does not require children under 18 to provide identification when traveling with a companion within the United States. The companion will need acceptable identification.

## Q: Is a passport my only other option if my state is not compliant? (#)

No. TSA currently accepts several other forms of identity documents and will continue to do so. For more information on acceptable forms of identification for boarding aircraft, please see [TSA's website \(http://www.tsa.gov/traveler-information/acceptable-ids\)](http://www.tsa.gov/traveler-information/acceptable-ids).

## Q: Is DHS trying to build a national database with all of our information? (#)

No. REAL ID is a national set of standards, not a national identification card. REAL ID does not create a federal database of driver license information. Each jurisdiction continues to issue its own unique license, maintains its own records, and controls who gets access to those records and under what circumstances. The purpose of REAL ID is to make our identity documents more consistent and secure.

## Q: What happens to travelers who show up without a compliant license? Will TSA turn them away? (#)

DHS has been working with states for years around REAL ID compliance and have provided technical assistance, grants and other support to them. We are also providing more than two years advance notice of implementation with respect to domestic air travel to allow ample time for all states to achieve compliance, or for potential air travelers to acquire an alternate form of ID if their state does not comply with REAL ID.

Starting January 22, 2018, travelers who do not have a license from a compliant state or a state that has been granted an extension (a complete list of non-compliant states/ territories can be found here) will be asked to provide alternate acceptable identification. If the traveler

cannot provide an acceptable form of identification, they will not be permitted through the security checkpoint.

\*American Samoa is subject to REAL ID enforcement as of February 5, 2018.

## Q: Why are some states still not compliant? Isn't this law? (#)

REAL ID is a mandate on Federal agencies, restricting the circumstances under which they may accept state-issued driver's licenses and identification cards for official purposes. Participation by states is voluntary, although Federal agencies are prohibited from accepting driver's licenses or identification cards from noncompliant states for official purposes (e.g., boarding aircraft, accessing federal facilities, and entering nuclear power plants).

## Q: How does REAL ID implementation impact states that provide driver's licenses and IDs to certain non-citizens/undocumented immigrants? (#)

REAL ID allows compliant states to issue driver's licenses and identification cards where the identity of the applicant cannot be assured or for whom lawful presence is not determined. In fact, some states currently issue such noncompliant cards to undocumented individuals. These cards must clearly state on their face (and in the machine readable zone) that it is not acceptable for official purposes and must use a unique design or color to differentiate them from compliant cards. DHS cautions against assuming that possession of a noncompliant card indicates the holder is an undocumented individual, given that several states issue noncompliant licenses for reasons unrelated to lawful presence.

## Q: How will the phase-out of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)

# Program affect state issuance of driver's licenses and IDs to DACA beneficiaries? (#)

The REAL ID Act allows states to issue temporary (i.e., limited-term), REAL ID-compliant driver's licenses and ID cards to applicants who provide valid, documentary evidence that they have “approved deferred action status.” [Sec. 202(c)(2)(B)(viii)] Under the REAL ID regulation, applicants with approved deferred action who hold valid Employment Authorization Documents (EADs) and Social Security Numbers (SSNs) may qualify to receive temporary REAL ID driver's licenses and ID cards. The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) Program standardized and expedited the process for obtaining these supporting identification documents for individuals with Deferred Action seeking REAL IDs. Individuals with approved Deferred Action, valid EADs and valid SSNs may continue to hold temporary (limited-term) REAL IDs until their expiration. In any case, REAL ID compliant states may continue to issue noncompliant licenses and IDs to individuals with or without lawful status, including deferred action, as defined under the REAL ID Act.

## Additional Questions? (#)

Additional questions may be sent to the Department of Homeland Security at [REALID@hq.dhs.gov](mailto:REALID@hq.dhs.gov) (<mailto:osiis@dhs.gov>).

Last Published Date: February 5, 2018