



California

Secretary of State

Vote-by-Mail Ballot Return Frequently Asked Questions

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. Any registered voter may vote using a vote-by-mail ballot instead of going to the polls on Election Day.

✓ How do I vote my vote-by-mail ballot?

1. Complete it:

Mark your choices on your ballot.

2. Seal it:

Secure your completed ballot inside the vote-by-mail ballot return envelope you received from your county elections office.

3. 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?

1. By Drop Box:

Every active, registered voter in California will be mailed a ballot for the November 3, 2026, General Election. You may personally deliver your ballot to any polling or ballot drop-off location in California by 8:00 p.m. on Election Day.

2. In Person:

Polling locations are established by county elections officials and are open

from **7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. on Election Day, Tuesday, November 3, 2026.**

To find a location to vote early before Election Day, visit caearlyvoting.sos.ca.gov.

3. By Mail:

Mail your ballot back as soon as possible after you receive it. To be counted, your ballot must be postmarked no later than Election Day.

We recommend mailing it at least 7 days before Election Day.

If you mail it closer to Election Day, take it to a United States Post Office and ask a postal employee for a manual postmark.

✓ When should I return my vote-by-mail ballot?

Return your ballot as soon as possible after you receive it. Vote-by-mail ballots dropped off at a secure drop box, drop-off location, polling place, vote center, or county elections office must be received by the close of polls at 8:00 p.m. on Election Day.

Vote-by-mail ballots mailed through USPS must be postmarked by Election Day. We recommend mailing it at least 7 days before Election Day. If you mail it closer to Election Day, take it to a United States Post Office and ask a postal employee for a manual postmark.

✓ **What if I am unable to personally return my 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 return envelope. Anyone may return your ballot for you, as long as they do not get paid on a per ballot basis.

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

Vote-by-mail ballot return envelopes must be postmarked no later than Election Day and received by a voter's county elections office no later than 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 to receive automatic notifications when your ballot is received and counted or if there is any issue with your ballot so it 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. You can sign up to receive automatic notifications by text message, email, or voice call on the status of your ballot at 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 is any issue with your

ballot, you will be notified with instructions on how to correct it 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 ballot 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, elections officials contact USPS immediately. Elections officials have spent years establishing relationships and regular communication with local and state postal representatives to prepare for elections.

✓ **Are drop boxes secure?**

Yes. Ballot drop boxes are secure, locked boxes that are clearly marked as an "Official Ballot Drop Box." Ballots placed in drop boxes are regularly collected by two authorized county employees. Ballots are then 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 to receive automatic notifications when your ballot is 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 or my signature doesn't compare to my signature on file?

If you forgot to sign your vote-by-mail ballot return envelope or a county elections official determines that the signature on your return envelope does not compare to your signature in your registration record, your county elections official will notify you by mail, phone, email, or through the “Where’s My Ballot?” ballot tracking tool (if you signed up for that service). 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 received at a secure drop box, drop-off location, polling place, vote center, or county elections office on or before 8:00 p.m. on Election Day. Mailed vote-by-mail ballots must be postmarked no later than Election Day. You can sign-up for ballot tracking at WheresMyBallot.sos.ca.gov to receive automatic notifications by email, text message, or voice call when your ballot has been received and counted, or if there is any issue with your ballot so it can be corrected. Additionally, the status of your ballot will be uploaded to VoterStatus.sos.ca.gov within 60 days of the election.

**For more information, visit
vote.ca.gov or call our Voter
Hotline at (800) 345-VOTE (8683).**



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