

FACTSHEET

Driver's Licenses

More than 25 million Californians are licensed to drive by the state Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV).

General (Class C) Driver's License

In order to obtain a driver's license, an individual who is 18 years of age or older must go to a DMV office and do the following:

- Complete an application
- Provide a thumbprint
- Have his or her picture taken
- Provide his or her social security number
- Verify his or her birth date and legal presence in the U.S.
- Provide his or her true full name
- Pay the application fee
- Pass a vision exam
- Pass a traffic laws and signs test
- Provide proof of residency

If the applicant has never been licensed before, DMV will issue a permit upon completion of these tasks. When practicing driving, the individual must be accompanied by an adult who is 18 or older, with a valid California driver's license.

As soon as the permit holder is ready, he or she may make an appointment to take a driving test; the applicant must provide proof of financial responsibility before taking the test. Once the applicant passes the test, DMV issues an interim license that is valid for 90 days until he or she receives the permanent license in the mail. (DMV may waive the driving test if the individual holds a license in another state, but not if the individual holds a license in another country.)

Provisional License

Individuals under 18 years of age must take a number of additional steps to obtain a driver's license, as follows:

- Hold a permit for at least six months
- Complete 50 hours of driving practice with a parent, guardian, or instructor
- Complete a three-hour driver's education course and at least six hours of behind-the-wheel training with a certified instructor
- Pass written, driving, and vision tests at a DMV office

A teen driver must be at least 15 ½, and offer proof of completion of the classroom portion of a driver's education course, in order to apply for a permit. During the permit period, which can be as

long as 12 months from the date of application, the permit holder may drive a car only when accompanied by a licensed California driver over the age of 25.

Upon completion of these steps, the permit holder may apply for a provisional driver's license. With some exceptions, during the first 12 months a provisional driver's license holder cannot drive between 11pm and 5am, or drive with anyone under the age of 20 in the vehicle, unless accompanied by a licensed driver who is his or her parent or guardian, a licensed driver who is 25 years of age or older, or a certified driving instructor. These restrictions end either 12 months after receiving a provisional license or when the license holder turns 18, whichever comes first.

An applicant who is 17 ½ or older may apply for an instruction permit without providing proof of completion of a driver's education course, but cannot obtain a driver's license until he or she turns 18.

“Driving Privilege Only” License

Pursuant to AB 60 (Alejo, Chapter 524, Statutes of 2013), DMV began on January 2, 2015, to issue driver's licenses to individuals who are ineligible for a social security number but can provide certain other documentation. To date, more than 900,000 individuals have received these licenses, commonly referred to as “driving privilege only” (DP) licenses. DP licenses cannot be used for identification purposes. Federal law requires the DP license to include a recognizable feature on the front of the card; California's DP license includes the words “FEDERAL LIMITS APPLY” on the front of the card.

If an applicant is unable to provide satisfactory proof of legal presence, he or she may instead sign an affidavit attesting that he or she is both ineligible for a social security number and unable to submit satisfactory proof that his or her presence is authorized under federal law.

REAL ID License

The federal REAL ID Act of 2005 (REAL ID) enacts the 9/11 Commission's recommendation to establish federal standards for issuing driver's licenses and other sources of identification. It establishes minimum standards including enhanced security features and a requirement for applicants to provide their social security number, birth certificate, and proof of legal presence in the US. Effective October 1, 2020, an individual 18 years or older must have a REAL ID compliant driver's license or ID card in order to board a domestic flight or to enter military bases and most federal facilities.

DMV will begin offering federal compliant REAL ID driver's licenses and ID cards on January 22, 2018. A REAL ID compliant license or ID card will not be required to drive, vote, apply for or receive federal benefits (e.g., veterans, social security), or to enter a federal facility that does not require ID (such as a post office). In order to obtain a REAL ID compliant driver's license or ID card, an individual must apply in person at a DMV field office and must provide proof of identity, proof of social security number, and proof of California residency. For more information, see <https://www.dmv.ca.gov/portal/dmv/detail/realid>.

Other Driver's Licenses

DMV issues a number of other types of driver's licenses, each with their own set of eligibility criteria, including:

- **Class A Commercial Driver's License**, which generally allows an individual to operate any legal combination of vehicles; or to tow any single vehicle with a Gross Vehicle Weight Rating (GVWR) of more than 10,000 lbs., any trailer bus, or more than one vehicle.
- **Class B Commercial Driver's License**, which generally allows an individual to operate a single vehicle with a GVWR of more than 26,000 lbs.; a three-axle vehicle weighing more than 6,000 lbs. GVWR; a bus; or a farm vehicle. It also allows an individual to tow any single vehicle with a GVWR of up to 10,000 lbs.
- **Class C Commercial Driver's License**, which generally allows an individual to operate a vehicle carrying hazardous materials or to tow a single vehicle of up to 10,000 lbs. GVWR.
- **Non-Commercial Class A Driver's License**, which generally allows an individual to tow a trailer (such as a livestock trailer) with a GVWR of up to 10,000 lbs. or a fifth-wheel travel trailer with a GVWR of more than 15,000 lbs.
- **Non-Commercial Class B Driver's License**, which generally allows an individual to operate a recreational vehicle (RV) or similar vehicle between 40 feet and 45 feet long.
- **Class M1 or M2 License**, which allows an individual to operate a motorcycle, moped, motorized scooter, or motorized bicycle.

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