

The REAL ID: What to Know

Introduction

Whether it be to board a flight, enter a bar, or something else, presenting a form of identification can be an anxiety-provoking experience for many undocumented individuals. It is important to understand what the requirements are in order to be prepared. This resource is designed to inform you about what the REAL ID is and how to determine if it is for you.

Note: This document is not intended to serve as legal advice and is not a substitute for obtaining legal advice from a qualified attorney. To find a legal services provider near you, visit immigrationlawhelp.org or ailalawyer.com.

What is the REAL ID?

According to the [Department of Homeland Security \(DHS\)](#), the federal REAL ID Act presents new ways driver's licenses and identification cards from states can be used when getting on a flight or entering secured federal buildings (like federal courthouses, military bases, etc). After the **May 7, 2025 deadline**, individuals boarding domestic flights and entering federal facilities will need to present a REAL ID (if they are planning to use a state-issued identification or driver's license) or [other acceptable forms of identification](#) (such as an unexpired foreign passport).

REAL ID FAQ

What do REAL IDs look like?

Each state issues REAL IDs with a design unique to that state that look the same regardless of the identity of the ID holder. In other words, your REAL ID will not reveal anything about your immigration status or look different from all other REAL IDs in your state.

Who is eligible for the REAL ID?

Getting a REAL ID requires proof of identity, state residency, and current legal presence in the U.S. (like a social security card, DACA, or TPS status, for instance). An undocumented individual who does not meet all these requirements may apply for a non-REAL ID driver's license or state ID, depending on which state they live in. Check with your state DMV for more information. [Learn more about REAL ID requirements in your state here.](#)

Do I need a REAL ID in order to fly domestically (within the U.S.)?

Not necessarily. There are other identification documents an individual can use when flying domestically. However, if you prefer to use a driver's license or state ID while flying, a REAL ID-compliant driver's license or state ID will be required starting May 7, 2025. If you have no preference on what ID to use, you may not need a REAL ID. For domestic flights, [TSA lists other approved forms of identification.](#)

[Are there other situations where I'll need the REAL ID?](#)

Other than boarding domestic flights, an individual holding a REAL ID can enter secured federal facilities (like military bases, federal courthouses, etc).

[What if I miss the May 3, 2025 deadline?](#)

The May 7, 2025 deadline is set for individuals who are interested in flying domestically and/or entering secured federal facilities and are planning to use a driver's license or state ID. Accessing these locations, as of the May 7, 2025 deadline, will begin to require REAL ID compliant driver's licenses or state IDs (should someone want to use these as a form of identification).

Alternatives to the REAL ID

It is not mandatory to get a REAL ID driver's license or identification. **The [Transportation and Security Administration \(TSA\)](#) will continue to accept other forms of identification for individuals boarding domestic flights**, such as an unexpired foreign passport or employment authorization card. Other locales that check identification informally, such as bars or restaurants verifying drinking age, will not mandate REAL ID compliant identification. For more travel tips, check out the Guide for Undocumented Individuals Traveling in the U.S.: immigrantsrising.org/travel-us.

Remember: your driver's license or state identification card must be REAL ID-compliant starting **May 7, 2025** in order to use either of these identifications to board a domestic flight (within the U.S.) or to enter secure federal facilities. If you are not sure if your ID is REAL ID-compliant, please contact your state department of motor vehicles.

This resource was created by Jesús Flores Rodríguez with editing support from Claire Calderón and Denia Pérez, Esq.

Immigrants Rising helps you make decisions based on your potential, not your perceived limits. Visit our website so you can see what's possible: immigrantsrising.org. For inquiries regarding this resource, please contact Jesus Flores, Legal Services Programming Lead, at legalintake@immigrantsrising.org. Updated 9/2023.