



NASS Fact Sheet: Early and Absentee Voting Information for the November 2020 General Election

09/30/2020

Most people in the United States vote at their local polling place on Election Day. However, states also allow people to vote in-person before Election Day, or by mail. In many states this is referred to as early or absentee voting.

Traditionally, state eligibility requirements for absentee voting required people to designate a specific reason for being unable to vote at their polling place on Election Day. For example, a planned absence from the county on Election Day, illness or disability, caregiver responsibilities, etc. In recent years, a number of states have eliminated the requirement to provide a reason for voting absentee, either by-mail or in-person.

In some states, the option to vote in-person, prior to Election Day, without a reason, is referred to as early voting, while others still refer to it as absentee voting. For the November 2020 General Election, 42 states and Washington D.C. will allow some form of in-person voting, prior to Election Day, at a local election office or other designated location, without a reason (see chart below). In some states this may involve voting absentee at the county clerk's office, while in others it may involve early voting at a library, community center, or other location in a manner similar to voting at the polling place on Election Day.

Similarly, when it comes to voting by mail without having to provide a reason, some states still refer to this as absentee voting, while others may refer to it as vote-by-mail, voting-by-mail, mail-in ballots, etc. For the November 2020 General Election, 37 states and Washington D.C. will allow some form of voting by mail without having to provide a reason (see chart below). In 28 of these states a person must submit a request in order receive the ballot by mail. In the other 9 states and Washington D.C., all registered voters will automatically receive the ballot by mail. Additionally, 9 of the 13 states that require a reason to vote absentee will allow concerns about COVID-19 to be considered a valid reason.

It is important to note that each state has different procedures, requirements, timeframes, and terminology for voting and processing of absentee ballots.¹ For example, most states require mail absentee ballots to be returned by the close of polls on Election Day, either by mail, in-person, or at a ballot drop-box location. However, some states allow additional time for mail absentee ballots to arrive, provided the ballot is postmarked by Election Day. Additionally, many states allow election officials to begin some form [of processing absentee ballots prior to Election Day](#), including verifying the signature on the ballot envelope with a signature on file for the voter, and taking measures to resolve any discrepancies. Some states also allow election officials to take additional steps to prepare absentee ballots for counting, including removing the ballots from secrecy envelopes and running the ballots through scanning machines. And while state laws vary with regard to whether, and to what extent, absentee ballots can be "counted" prior to Election Day, absentee ballot results may not be released until after the polls close on Election Day.

¹ For details on state absentee voting requirements, including processing and counting of absentee ballots, see National Conference of State Legislatures: [Voting Outside the Polling Place: Absentee, All-Mail and other Voting at Home Options](#); also see Vote at Home: [Voting at Home Across States](#) (2018).

The chart below indicates which states allow some form of in-person voting (prior to Election Day) without having to provide a reason, as well states that allow some form of voting by mail without having to provide a reason, and whether mail ballots must be requested or are sent automatically.

Please note that the information in this document is subject to change prior to the November 2020 election, including as a result of changes made in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Efforts will be made to update the information as changes occur, but individuals should always refer to their trusted sources, their state or local election officials for complete and accurate election information. #TrustedInfo2020

Early and Mail/Absentee Voting Options for the November 2020 General Election

| | In-Person Voting, Prior to Election Day, No Reason Required (Early Voting) | Mail/Absentee Ballots Available by Request | | Mail Ballots Automatically Sent to Registered Voters |
|----------------------|---|--|--------------------|---|
| | | Reason Required | No Reason Required | |
| Alabama | | ●* | | |
| Alaska | ● | | ● | |
| Arizona | ● | | ● | |
| Arkansas | ● | ●* | | |
| California | ● | -- | -- | ● |
| Colorado | ● | -- | -- | ● |
| Connecticut | | ●* | | |
| Delaware | | | ● | |
| District of Columbia | ● | -- | -- | ● |
| Florida | ● | | ● | |
| Georgia | ● | | ● | |
| Hawaii | ● | -- | -- | ● |
| Idaho | ● | | ● | |
| Illinois | ● | | ● | |
| Indiana | ● | ● | | |
| Iowa | ● | | ● | |
| Kansas | ● | | ● | |
| Kentucky | ● | ●* | | |
| Louisiana | ● | ●* | | |
| Maine | ● | | ● | |
| Maryland | ● | | ● | |
| Massachusetts | ● | | ● | |
| Michigan | ● | | ● | |
| Minnesota | ● | | ● | |

| | | | | |
|----------------|---|----|----|---|
| Mississippi | | ● | | |
| Missouri | | ●* | | |
| Montana | ● | | ● | |
| Nebraska | ● | | ● | |
| Nevada | ● | -- | -- | ● |
| New Hampshire | | ●* | | |
| New Jersey | ● | -- | -- | ● |
| New Mexico | ● | | ● | |
| New York | ● | ●* | | |
| North Carolina | ● | | ● | |
| North Dakota | ● | | ● | |
| Ohio | ● | | ● | |
| Oklahoma | ● | | ● | |
| Oregon | ● | -- | -- | ● |
| Pennsylvania | | | ● | |
| Rhode Island | | | ● | |
| South Carolina | | | ● | |
| South Dakota | ● | | ● | |
| Tennessee | ● | ● | | |
| Texas | ● | ● | | |
| Utah | ● | -- | -- | ● |
| Vermont | ● | -- | -- | ● |
| Virginia | ● | | ● | |
| Washington | ● | -- | -- | ● |
| West Virginia | ● | ●* | | |
| Wisconsin | ● | | ● | |
| Wyoming | ● | | ● | |

* indicates states where concerns related to COVID-19 will be considered a valid reason to request a mail ballot