



The Patriot-News

MIDSTATE TRAVELER

Internet makes getting passport simpler, quicker

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You might as well face it: Eventually, you're going to need a passport to travel anywhere outside the U.S. So why wait any longer?

Thanks to the Internet, getting a passport is relatively easy. Whether you're obtaining your first passport or applying for a renewal, applications can be downloaded from the U.S. Department of State's Web site at http://travel.state.gov/passport/forms/forms_847.html.

First-time applicants, or those whose passports expired more than 15 years ago, must submit the following in person at a passport acceptance facility: a completed passport application (Form DS-11), proof of U.S. citizenship, proof of identity (such as a driver's license), two recent, identical color photos that measure 2 inches by 2 inches and \$100 in fees. Check with the passport acceptance facility you'll be using to determine which forms of payment it accepts.

Local passport acceptance facilities include all county courthouses, certain post offices and some community libraries. If you're planning to go somewhere other than a courthouse, be aware that while some accept walk-ins -- such as the post office on Crooked Hill Road in Susquehanna Twp., which also offers passport photo services -- most require appointments.

According to employees at the post offices on Jonestown Road in Lower Paxton Twp. and in Camp Hill, backlogs that were causing delays have been cleared up, and appointments can often be obtained within a day if you're flexible. But in Camp Hill, if you need to go between 3 and 4 p.m., when students are out of school, you might have to wait up to two weeks to get in.

A complete list of post offices that offer passport services is available at www.usps.com. Click on All Products & Services, then Passports. For all acceptance facilities, go to <http://iafdb.travel.state.gov/>.

Proof of U.S. citizenship can be an expired passport or a government-issued (certified) birth certificate. If you were born in Pennsylvania, certified birth certificates are available through the state Department of Health's Division of Vital Records.

You can apply online by going to www.dsf.health.state.pa.us/health, clicking on Birth & Death Certificates and following the directions. Payment is by credit card. The department charges \$10 for the certificate plus an \$8 credit card processing fee.

You can also apply in person at the division's local office in Room 129 of the Health & Welfare building at Seventh and Foster streets in downtown Harrisburg. Office hours are 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Whether you apply online, in person or through some other means as explained on the department's Web site, make sure you read the entire list of items you must have to apply or call 772-3480 for details. You can also use either of these sources to determine who to contact if you were born outside Pennsylvania.

For passport renewals, complete Form DS-82 and mail it, along with your current passport, two recent

passport photos and \$75 by check or money order, to the address listed on the Web site and the application.

Information about obtaining passports for babies, children and teenagers, as well as details about getting passports at the last minute, are also available on the Department of State's Web site.

Annette Reiff's column appears Sundays in the Travel section. Reiff, a certified travel counselor, is a former travel agent who has taught in the travel programs at Harrisburg Area Community College and York Technical Institute. An experienced traveler, she has written on a range of travel and business topics. Reiff can be reached at alr@paonline.com.

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