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FAQs: Voting by Mail in North Carolina in 2020

(Note: The information in this report is accurate as of August 7, 2020. Court decisions and other developments may result in changes. When necessary, we will update this document as soon as possible.)

Requesting Your Ballot

Do I need an excuse or special circumstance to vote by mail?

No. Any registered voter in North Carolina may vote an absentee ballot by mail.

How do I request my absentee ballot by mail?

Fill out an official [State Absentee Ballot Request Form](#), available for download at [NCSBE.gov](#), or pick one up at your [county board of elections office](#). The request form comes with detailed instructions and is [available in Spanish](#). You may also contact your [county board of elections](#) and request that one be mailed to you.

By September 1, an online absentee ballot request portal will be available on the State Board of Elections' website, [NCSBE.gov](#).

After completing the request form, you may return it to your [county board of elections](#) by fax, email, mail, or in person.

When can I request my ballot for the November 3, 2020 election?

Absentee ballots may be requested from now until the deadline – 5 p.m. October 27, 2020. The request must be received in the [county board of elections](#) office by 5 p.m. October 27. If you are mailing your request, please include enough time for your request to be received by the deadline.

When will I receive my absentee ballot for the 2020 general election?

Beginning September 4, 2020, ballots will be mailed by county boards of elections to voters who have returned a request form.

Are absentee by mail ballots automatically sent out to all registered voters?

No. North Carolina voters must request a ballot using the [State Absentee Ballot Request Form](#).

What are acceptable ways to include my signature on my absentee ballot request form?

A wet ink signature is not required for an absentee ballot request. However, the signature must be unique to the voter and must be readable. Voters may use a pen, or their finger, stylus, or mouse for the signature if they have the capability. Voters may not use a service such as DocuSign that inserts a typed or cursive font signature that is not made by the voter.

Do I need to include a copy of a photo ID with my absentee request form/ballot?

No. North Carolina voters are not required to provide or show ID until further order of the courts.

Where can I check to be sure you have received and processed my absentee ballot request form for November?

Absentee ballots will be mailed to voters beginning September 4. After September 4, if you request a ballot and do not receive it within about a week, contact your county board of elections.

Can someone request an absentee ballot for me?

Yes. Your near relative or legal guardian may request a ballot for you. A near relative is: your spouse, brother, sister, parent, grandparent, child, grandchild, mother-in-law, father-in-law, daughter-in-law, son-in-law, stepparent, or stepchild.

Can I request a ballot for my child who is away at college?

Yes. A voter's near relative may request an absentee ballot if their child is a registered voter. The request form must include all required information, including the voter's driver's license number or last four of their Social Security number. The near relative will sign and provide their address, daytime phone number, and relationship to the voter.

Does a faxed absentee ballot request need a cover sheet?

No.

Can I pick up my ballot in person or does it have to be mailed to me?

The ballot must be mailed.

What if a voter in a hospital, nursing home or other facility needs assistance voting by mail?

Any registered voter may request assistance from a Multipartisan Assistance Team (MAT). A MAT is a group appointed by a county board of elections to assist voters in facilities with mail-in absentee voting. To schedule a MAT visit, contact your county board of elections.

Can a resident of a nursing home or other facility use the facility's fax machine to fax an absentee ballot request to a county board of elections?

Yes. The fax machine used to send an absentee ballot request form does not need to be a personal fax machine.

In the absence of a MAT, can a facility print blank absentee ballot requests for residents of the facility? Can the facility deliver the blank absentee ballot requests to the residents of the facility, or should they be placed in a common area such as a lobby?

The facility may provide forms to the residents or leave them in a common area. Either option is OK. A facility employee may not assist the voter or return a voter's request form.

What if I live on a boat or in an RV and want to request an absentee ballot by mail?

On the request form, you should provide the address where you want your ballot sent. This may be different from your residential address, which is the place to which, when you are absent, you intend to return.

Your residential address might be, for example, an RV park or boat dock where you typically return and intend to remain indefinitely. It does not have to be an address where you receive mail. If you do not receive mail at your residential address, or if you want your ballot sent to another address, you should provide the mailing address where you receive mail that you want your ballot mailed to.

May I request an absentee ballot if I do not have a permanent residence?

You are required to provide your NC residential address, which is the place to which, when you are absent, you intend to return. If you are homeless or live in a non-traditional dwelling, you should list the location or cross street under the “NC Residential Address” section where you typically stay or sleep and intend to return when you are absent. This place does not have to be an address where you receive mail. If you do not receive mail at your residential address, or if you want your ballot sent to another address, you should provide the mailing address where you receive mail that you want your ballot mailed to.

If a voter completes and signs a request form, can a third party assist in scanning the form into a PDF for mailing by the voter?

A third party may assist the voter in scanning the form, but may not return the form for the voter. Only the voter or the voter’s near relative or legal guardian may return the form.

Are organizations allowed to email request forms to voters?

Organizations may email blank [State Absentee Ballot Request Forms](#) to voters but may not pre-fill any part of the forms. Third party groups should include the instructions with the form.

Marking Your Ballot and Witness Requirements

How many witnesses do I need for my absentee ballot?

For the 2020 general election, only one witness is required for an absentee ballot. The voter is required to mark the ballot in the presence of the witness. The witness should not observe so closely that they can see how the voter votes. Instructions will come with your absentee ballot.

Who is not allowed to serve as a witness to an absentee ballot?

Individuals prohibited from witnessing an absentee ballot include:

- A person younger than 18.
- A candidate for election, unless the candidate is the voter’s near relative.
- If the voter is a patient or resident at a hospital, clinic, nursing home, or adult care home, the following individuals are also prohibited from assisting: an owner, manager, director, or employee of that facility; an individual who holds any elected federal, state or local office or precinct political party or organization office; or a campaign manager or treasurer for any candidate or political party.

If I make a mistake on my ballot, may I request a new one?

Yes, if you have not returned the ballot, you may contact your [county board of elections](#) and request a new ballot. The first ballot should not be returned and will not count.

I live by myself, am very susceptible to the virus and do not want contact with anyone. How do I get my absentee ballot witnessed?

A voter is required to vote their ballot in the presence of a witness, but the witness may do so while socially distanced. In fact, the law requires that the witness preserve the secrecy of the voter's ballot. A voter may choose to vote their ballot outside or may stand across the room from the witness. A voter could also ask their witness to observe through a window. In addition to wearing a mask and gloves, the voter and witness may wish to use separate pens and use hand sanitizer or wash their hands with soap and water before and after touching the balloting materials.

If I only want to vote for president, can I leave the rest of the ballot blank and will it still count?

Yes.

Returning Your Ballot

When is the ballot return deadline for the November 3, 2020 election?

For civilian absentee voters, the container-return envelope with the voted ballot enclosed must be returned to the county board of elections no later than 5 p.m. on Election Day. Absentee ballots received after 5 p.m. on Election Day will be counted only if they are postmarked on or before Election Day and received by mail no later than 5 p.m. November 6. Ballots *without* a postmark must be received by Election Day.

If I've received my ballot by mail, may I still vote in person?

Yes. You may still vote in person as long as you did not return your absentee ballot. Your absentee ballot will be spoiled after you vote in person.

Can I vote the ballot and return it to the county board of elections, but change my mind and cancel my ballot and vote on Election Day instead?

No. Once you return your ballot, you may not change or cancel your ballot.

Will I be notified if my absentee ballot is rejected? Will I have a chance to remedy any deficiencies?

County boards of elections will contact voters when there are deficiencies with their absentee ballot. You should provide your phone number or email address on the request form in case the county board needs to contact you. The State Board encourages voters to carefully read and follow the instructions that come with the ballot. The State Board also encourages voters to request and return their absentee ballot as early as possible to ensure time remains to correct any issues. If an issue arises and the voter is unable to successfully cast an absentee ballot, that voter may still vote during the in-person early voting period or on Election Day.

May I return my friends' and neighbors' absentee ballots?

No. You may only return someone's ballot if they are a near relative. A near relative is: your spouse, brother, sister, parent, grandparent, child, grandchild, mother-in-law, father-in-law, daughter-in-law, son-in-law, stepparent, stepchild, or legal guardian.

May another person return my absentee ballot for me?

Yes, but only if that person is your spouse, brother, sister, parent, grandparent, child, grandchild, mother-in-law, father-in-law, daughter-in-law, son-in-law, stepparent, stepchild, or legal guardian. County boards of elections keep track of who drops off each absentee ballot.

May two people return their ballots in the same envelope?

No. The returned ballot envelope is specific to each voter and must contain that voter's ballot.

May I hand-deliver my voted absentee ballot to my county board of elections office?

Yes. If you are delivering your voted ballot in person, it must be returned to your county board of elections office by 5 p.m. on Election Day. You may also return it to any early voting site in the county.

May I hand-deliver my voted absentee ballot to the polls on Election Day?

No. You may return your ballot to any early voting site in your county during the early voting period, but not to your polling place on Election Day. One-Stop early voting ends at 3 p.m. October 31.

I heard that if I vote absentee by mail, my vote may not get counted. Is that true?

No. Each eligible voter's absentee ballot is counted, if it contains all required elements and meets the deadline for return to the county board of elections.

If you drop off a sealed absentee ballot at an early voting site, do you have to wait in line?

Yes. If you do not want to wait in line, you can mail your ballot.

How much does it cost to mail my ballot in?

55 cents (one first-class stamp) or one Forever Stamp

Absentee Voting Security

How secure is absentee by-mail voting?

Numerous safeguards are included in the absentee voting process. Absentee ballots are sent only to registered voters who request them using an official [State Absentee Ballot Request Form](#).

The request must be signed and include identifying information about the voter, including date of birth and driver's license number or last four digits of the voter's Social Security number. Voters must vote their ballot in the presence of a witness, and that witness must sign the absentee return envelope certifying that the voter marked their ballot and is the registered voter submitting the marked ballot.

Only the voter or their near relative or legal guardian may return the ballot. Upon return, the county board of elections reviews the absentee envelope to ensure compliance with the legal requirements. Once the ballot is accepted, that voter is marked in the system as having voted in that election.

Data on who has requested absentee ballots is now confidential until Election Day. Criminal penalties have been increased for absentee voting fraud-related offenses. Many people are watching our absentee voting process, including candidates, political parties, county boards of elections, and political and data scientists. If there are anomalies or questionable activities, they will be reported to election officials.

Finally, the State Board of Elections has an Investigations Division that investigates credible allegations of elections fraud and refers cases to prosecutors when warranted by the evidence. The State Board also conducts several post-election audits which will catch inconsistencies that can then be investigated by the board or our Investigations Division.

What prevents someone from voting absentee and then voting again in-person?

If someone has voted an absentee ballot and then shows up to vote in person, the check-in system will alert the poll worker that the person has already voted.

Will anyone know who I voted for?

No. Ballots remain in the sealed absentee envelope until they have been fully approved by the board. During the counting process, the ballot is removed from the envelope and fed into the tabulator. Ballots are secret by law, and others will not know who you voted for.

Can I view a list of all voters who have requested an absentee ballot?

Absentee by mail data is confidential until Election Day or until ballots are returned. This data may be viewed once ballots are returned and counted.