

What Is the 2020 Census?



The 2020 Census counts every person living in the 50 states, District of Columbia, and five U.S. territories.

The count is mandated by the Constitution and conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, a nonpartisan government agency. The 2020 Census counts the population in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and five U.S. territories (Puerto Rico, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands). Each home will receive an invitation to respond to a short questionnaire—online, by phone, or by mail. This will mark the first time that you will be able to respond to the census online.

Why We Conduct This Count

The census provides critical data that lawmakers, business owners, teachers, and many others use to provide daily services, products, and support for you and your community. Every year, billions of dollars in federal funding go to hospitals, fire departments, schools, roads, and other resources based on census data.

The results of the census also determine the number of seats each state will have in the U.S. House of Representatives, and they are used to draw congressional and state legislative districts.

It's also in the Constitution: Article 1, Section 2, mandates that the country conduct a count of its population once every 10 years. The 2020 Census will mark the 24th time that the country has counted its population since 1790.

Counting Everyone

Participating in the census is required by law, even if you recently completed another survey from the Census Bureau. A complete and accurate count is critical for you and your community because the results of the 2020 Census will affect community funding, congressional representation, and more.

Overall Timeline/Important Dates

Counting every person living in the United States is a massive undertaking, and efforts begin years in advance. Here's a look at some of the key dates along the way:

January–September 2019: The U.S. Census Bureau opens 248 area census offices across the country. These offices support and manage the census takers who work all over the country to conduct the census.

August 2019: Census takers begin visiting areas that have experienced a lot of change and growth to ensure that the Census Bureau's address list is up to date. This is called address canvassing, and it helps to ensure that everyone receives an invitation to participate in the 2020 Census.

January 2020: The Census Bureau begins counting the population in remote Alaska.

April 1, 2020: Census Day is observed nationwide. By this date, every home will receive an invitation to participate in the 2020 Census. Once the invitation arrives, you should respond for your home in one of three ways: online, by phone, or by mail. When you respond to the census, you tell the Census Bureau where you live as of April 1, 2020.

April 2020: Census takers begin visiting college students who live on campus, people living in senior centers, and others who live among large groups of people. Census takers also begin conducting quality check interviews to help ensure an accurate count.

May 2020: The Census Bureau begins visiting homes that haven't responded to the 2020 Census to make sure everyone is counted.

December 2020: The Census Bureau delivers apportionment counts to the President and Congress as required by law.

March 31, 2021: By this date, the Census Bureau will send redistricting counts to states. This information is used to redraw legislative districts based on population changes.

Census Takers in Your Neighborhood

Starting in 2019, you may notice census takers in your neighborhood.

This is a normal part of preparations for the 2020 Census. Census Bureau employees will also be in the community to continue collecting information for the American Community Survey and other ongoing surveys. Starting in 2019, you may notice census takers in your neighborhood.

How Can You Verify That Someone Is a Census Worker?

If someone visits your home to collect information for the 2020 Census, you can do the following to verify their identity:

First, check to make sure that they have a valid ID badge, with their photograph, a U.S. Department of Commerce watermark, and an expiration date.

If you still have questions about their identity, you can contact your Regional Census Center to speak with a Census Bureau representative.

Why Are Census Workers Out in Communities?

You might see census takers in your neighborhood for a few different reasons:

1. They are verifying addresses in preparation for the census.
2. They are collecting responses to the census or another survey.
3. They are dropping off census materials.
4. They are conducting quality checks related to the census.
5. Census workers are usually conducting business on evenings and weekends.

Census takers who verify addresses are called address canvassers. They help ensure an accurate and complete count by verifying addresses and noting where houses, apartments, shelters, and other residences are located. Census takers will attempt to knock on every door in the neighborhood they are canvassing.

Explore where the Census Bureau plans to send address canvassers with this interactive map.

In May 2020, census takers begin visiting homes that haven't responded to the 2020 Census to help ensure everyone is counted. At the same time, other Census Bureau representatives will be visiting homes for ongoing surveys, such as the American Community Survey.

Be Proactive

By April 1, 2020, all homes will receive an invitation to participate in the 2020 Census. The best way to avoid a follow-up visit from a census taker is to fill out the 2020 Census questionnaire online, by phone, or by mail as soon as you receive your invitation to participate.

Sign up below for the latest news and updates.

Conducting the Count

The 2020 Census is a massive undertaking. It requires counting a diverse and growing population in the United States and the five U.S. territories. To do this, the U.S. Census Bureau must:

Make an accurate list of every residence in the U.S. and five U.S. territories—including houses, apartments, dormitories, military barracks, and more. Get a member of every residence to complete the census online, by phone, or by mail in March and April of 2020. Follow up in person with homes that have not responded.

Collecting Responses

There are three ways that the Census Bureau will initially collect responses from people for the 2020 Census: online, by phone, and by mail.

By April 1, 2020, you will receive an invitation to participate in the 2020 Census. Once the invitation arrives, you should respond for your home.

Starting in May 2020, the Census Bureau will begin following up in person with homes that have not responded to the census.

Counting Everyone in the Right Place

To ensure a complete and accurate count, the Census Bureau counts people at their usual residence, which is the place where they live and sleep most of the time, with a few exceptions. People who do not have a usual residence should be counted where they are on Census Day (April 1, 2020).

The Census Bureau has special processes in place to ensure that everyone in the 50 states, District of Columbia and five U.S. territories is counted.

Puerto Rico, The U.S. Island Areas

People who live in group living arrangements, such as college dorms, military barracks, skilled nursing facilities, correctional facilities, and shelters.

People who live in transitory living situations, such as RV parks, campgrounds, marinas, and hotels.

For the first time, you'll be able to respond to the census online!

Who Is Required To Respond?

Everyone living in the 50 states, District of Columbia, and five U.S. territories (Puerto Rico, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands) is required by law to be counted in the 2020 Census.

Why It's Required

Getting a complete and accurate census count is critically important. That's why your response is required by law. If you do not respond, the U.S. Census Bureau will follow up in person to collect your response.

Why is the census so important? The results are used to determine how much funding local communities receive for key public services and how many seats each state gets in Congress. State and local officials also use census counts to draw boundaries for congressional, state legislative, and school districts.

And while you are required by law to participate, the Census Bureau is also required by law to protect your answers. Your responses are used only to produce statistics. The Census Bureau does not disclose any personal information.

Special Living Situations

People in some special living situations may have questions about how to respond. This includes:

1. Students.
2. Service members.
3. People in correctional facilities.
4. People who move on Census Day (April 1, 2020).
5. People who do not have fixed addresses.
6. Visit Who to Count for information on how people in these groups will be counted.

Participation in Other Census Surveys

The Census Bureau will continue to conduct other surveys, like the American Community Survey, during 2020. If you are contacted about another survey, it is very important to participate. But you will still be required to respond to the 2020 Census even if you participate in another survey.

Ways to Respond

There are three ways to respond to the 2020 Census.

By April 1, 2020, every home will receive an invitation to participate in the 2020 Census. You will have three options for responding:

1. Online.
2. By phone.
3. By mail.

The 2020 Census marks the first time you'll have the option to respond online. You can even respond on your mobile device.

Different Timelines and Processes for Some Locations

If you live in the following locations, there will be some differences in your timeline for completing the 2020 Census or in the ways you can respond:

Puerto Rico.

The U.S. Island Areas (American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, U.S. Virgin Islands).

Very remote areas, such as parts of northern Maine and Alaska.

Areas that experienced a natural disaster.

Group living arrangements, such as on-campus student housing, correctional facilities, military bases, health care facilities, and shelters.

Special Circumstances

For some people, it's not clear how they should count themselves or the people in their homes. These circumstances may include:

People who live in more than one place.

People who are moving on Census Day (April 1, 2020).

People who are born or die on Census Day (April 1, 2020).

People experiencing homelessness.

Questions Asked

The 2020 Census is easy. The questions are simple.

As required by the Census Act, the U.S. Census Bureau submitted a list of questions to Congress on March 29, 2018. Based on those questions, the 2020 Census will ask:

1. **How many people are living or staying at your home on April 1, 2020?** This will help us count the entire U.S. population and ensure that we count people according to where they live on Census Day.
2. **Whether the home is owned or rented.** This will help us produce statistics about homeownership and renting. The rates of homeownership serve as one indicator of the nation's economy. They also help in administering housing programs and informing planning decisions.
3. **About the sex of each person in your home.** This allows us to create statistics about males and females, which can be used in planning and funding government programs. This data can also be used to enforce laws, regulations, and policies against discrimination.
4. **About the age of each person in your home.** The U.S. Census Bureau creates statistics to better understand the size and characteristics of different age groups. Agencies use this data to plan and fund government programs that support specific age groups, including children and older adults.
5. **About the race of each person in your home.** This allows us to create statistics about race and to provide other statistics by racial groups. This data helps federal agencies monitor compliance with anti-discrimination provisions, such as those in the Voting Rights Act and the Civil Rights Act.
6. **About whether a person in your home is of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin.** These responses help create statistics about this ethnic group. This is needed by federal agencies to monitor compliance with anti-discrimination provisions, such as those in the Voting Rights Act and the Civil Rights Act.

7. **About the relationship of each person in your home.** This allows the Census Bureau to create estimates about families, households, and other groups. Relationship data is used in planning and funding government programs that support families, including people raising children alone.
8. Governments, businesses, communities, and nonprofits all rely on the data that these questions produce to make critical decisions.

The Census Will Never Ask Certain Questions

During the 2020 Census, the Census Bureau **will never ask you for:**

1. ***Your Social Security number.***
2. ***Money or donations.***
3. ***Anything on behalf of a political party.***
4. ***Your bank or credit card account numbers.***

If someone claiming to be from the Census Bureau contacts you via email or phone and asks you for one of these things, it's a scam, and you should not cooperate. For more information, visit [Avoiding Fraud and Scams](#).

What Happens to Your Answers?

Your personal information is kept confidential. The Census Bureau is bound by federal law to protect your information, and your data is used only for statistical purposes.

Your responses are compiled with information from other homes to produce statistics, which never identifies your home or any person in your home.

How the Census Bureau Protects Your Data

The U.S. Census Bureau is bound by law to protect your answers and keep them strictly confidential. In fact, every employee takes an oath to protect your personal information for life.

Our Legal Duty to Protect Your Information

The Census Bureau is bound by Title 13 of the U.S. Code to keep your information confidential.

Under Title 13, the Census Bureau cannot release any identifiable information about you, your home, or your business, even to law enforcement agencies. The law ensures that your private data is protected and that your answers cannot be used against you by any government agency or court.

The answers you provide are used only to produce statistics. You are kept anonymous: The Census Bureau is not permitted to publicly release your responses in any way that could identify you or anyone else in your home.

Data Protection and Privacy Program

Being responsible stewards of your data is not only required by law, but it is also embedded in Census Bureau culture. Strict policies and statistical safeguards help protect the confidentiality of your information. Before releasing data products, the Census Bureau verifies that they meet its confidentiality standards.

Secure Technology

From the beginning of the data collection process, the Census Bureau follows industry best practices and federal requirements to protect your data.

The security of Census Bureau systems is a top priority, and our IT infrastructure is designed to defend against and contain cyber threats. We continually refine our approach to identifying, preventing, detecting, and responding to these threats.

Avoiding Fraud and Scams

The U.S. Census Bureau is committed to making the 2020 Census quick, easy, and safe for all participants. Here are some tips to help you stay safe.

Avoiding Scams Online

Phishing is a criminal act in which someone tries to get your information by pretending to be an entity that you trust. Phishing emails often direct you to a website that looks real but is fake—and may be infected with malware.

It is important to know that the Census Bureau will not send unsolicited emails to request your participation in the 2020 Census. Further, during the 2020 Census, the Census Bureau will never ask for:

Your Social Security number.

Your bank account or credit card numbers.

Money or donations.

In addition, the Census Bureau will not contact you on behalf of a political party.

Staying Safe at Home

If someone visits your home to collect a response for the 2020 Census, you can do the following to verify their identity:

First, check to make sure that they have a valid ID badge, with their photograph, a U.S. Department of Commerce watermark, and an expiration date. If you still have questions about their identity, you can call **800-923-8282** to speak with a local Census Bureau representative.

Online Census Staff Search

The below-mentioned website will assist you in confirming employment status with the Census Bureau.

<https://www.census.gov/main/www/search.html>

Once you are on the website go to, "Staff Search"

Type in the person's name to verify employment.

Reporting Suspected Fraud

If you suspect fraud, call **800-923-8282** to speak with a local Census Bureau representative. If it is determined that the visitor who came to your door does not work for the Census Bureau, contact your local police department.

Example of Census Identification

The following item(s) will be with a legitimate Census Bureau employee.

An Official Government photo Identification which includes the following:

1. Workers Name
2. Facial photograph of the worker
3. Expiration date
4. Department of Commerce logo on the front of the ID
5. On the back of ID: Height, Eye Color, Hair Color, and return address

A Census Bureau handbag and a laptop computer with the Official Census 2020 logo on the front of the same.

Follow this link to view the 2020 Census Questionnaire

(<https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial/2020/technical-documentation/questionnaires-and-instructions/questionnaires/2020-informational-questionnaire.pdf>)