

## Why a photocopy of your birth certificate isn't acceptable for official business

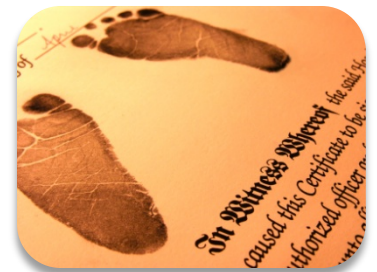
Learn about what makes a birth certificate official.

When preparing for the many milestones in life that require proof of personal identification, don't overlook the need to present an official birth certificate copy. Applying for a driver's license, marriage license, passport, enrolling children in school and even some jobs often require an official birth certificate copy to be presented. When you think of an 'official' birth certificate copy, what do you think? Well, don't think hospital copy or a photocopy from your office copier because that is NOT what the people requesting your "official" copy have in mind.



### Your Original Birth Record:

Often, people don't realize that what they consider their official birth certificate is not actually a legal document. The copy given to new parents at the hospital, sometimes with the baby's footprints on it, is meant to be a cherished keepsake but is not valid for official proof of identity. Your original birth certificate must remain on file at the designated vital records agency office of your birth place after being submitted for registration by the attending hospital. This is where the only "original" copy of your birth record is located. This version is kept under lock and key and most people will never see their original. This is done to help ensure your identity is protected. For purposes of official business you'll want to obtain a certified birth certificate from the department of public health or vital records office where the birth took place. This is also often described as an "official" copy.



### What makes a Certified Birth Certificate Official?

The number one difference between official and informational birth certificate copies is a registrar's seal. The type of seal used varies by states, but will be proof that the birth certificate is a government issued, certified document. The seal might be raised, embossed, impressed or multicolored. Most importantly it will be notarized (signed and dated) by the registrar. Certified copies can be used to prove identity for any reason. For example, these copies will be accepted when applying for passports and drivers licenses, among other occasions.

### What the Birth Certificate should include:

Most situations requiring a birth certificate will require evidence the certified certificate copy was issued by the office of vital statistics in the county, city or state where the birth occurred. In general, the notarized document will show the full certificate holder's name, the date and place of birth and a file or registration date within one year of the birth.

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## Example of a Short Form:

Aside from requiring an official birth certificate copy, some agencies will specify whether they want to see the long or short form. The short form is a computer generated certificate that typically only contains name, birth date, file date. The short form is a certified copy. It may or may not contain the parent's names. This form is commonly needed to prove identity for licensing, travel or estate purposes.

## Example of a Long Form:

The long form, also usually provided as a certified copy, is generally an actual photocopy of the archived certificate. This version provides everything on the short form (name, date, file date, place of birth) as well as any other information recorded by the hospital, such as parent's names and occupations, or birth time. The long form is not as commonly needed or available, but is generally used for passport, social security, international adoption or dual citizenship.

While it might seem tedious to go through the process of securing a certified, official birth certificate copy, it is for the public's safety that many organizations require it. If simple, non-certified photocopies were considered legally valid, identity theft could skyrocket. If a certified birth certificate was to fall into the wrong hands the potential for identity theft damage is significant. This is why it is recommended to keep your birth records and other vital records in a secure area such as a safe or security deposit box.



Next time you realize you need to present a birth certificate--remember why it has to be certified. The additional steps are in your best interest to protect your identity. If you have certified copies on file, make sure they are in a safe, secure area. If you do not have a copy handy, you may want to consider ordering your official birth certificate online. You never know how soon it will be that you need to present a certified copy.

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