

COVID-19 Georgia Voter Guide: Vote by mail basics, FYIs, and FAQs.

The threat of COVID-19 prompted the state of Georgia to push its Presidential Preference Primary elections back until June 9th, 2020. This unprecedented pandemic has spread through the state rapidly, leaving elections officials to make sweeping changes to the way we vote. Though our elections will continue, a lot is still unclear. One option to vote securely is to vote by mail.

I. On March 14, 2020, Georgia delayed its March 24 primary to June 9

- a. Georgia originally planned for two primaries – Presidential Preference on March 24 and General Primary on May 19. However, our Secretary of State has delayed both primaries because of the threat of illness from COVID-19. Both elections will now be held on June 9.
- b. Why have two elections in the first place?
 - i. **March 24.** The previously scheduled March 24 elections included the Georgia Presidential Preference Primary (“PPP”) elections. The PPP elections determine each party’s nominee for President in the general election in November. Other elections were also scheduled on the 24th, including local sheriff races and special-purpose local-option sales taxes (SPLOSTs).
 - ii. **May 19.** Before the change, the May 19 primaries were to select candidates for multiple local, state and federal races for the November general election and also included local non-partisan general elections in some locations.
 - iii. **June 9.** Now, due to ongoing health concerns, both primaries will have a new date of June 9, 2020.

II. Voters who voted early in March can still vote on June 9

- a. Early voters (by mail or in person) for the March 24 primary have had their votes counted for those elections. They will still be able to vote in the June 9 primary. These voters will be able to vote in General Primary elections, which are the races that were not included in the March 24 election. Voters will not vote again in any election that they have previously voted in.
- b. What if I didn’t vote early, can I still vote for candidates from the March 24 election?
 - i. **Yes.** Voters who did not vote in March will receive a ballot with options for both the PPP and General Primary elections.

III. Voters may vote by mail to help minimize the spread of COVID-19 in Georgia.

- a. Absentee voting, or vote by mail, means that people can cast their official vote by mail. You have to request a ballot. Georgians who vote absentee can fill out a paper ballot and either mail their vote or drop it off at their county elections office.
- b. How do you vote by mail?
 - i. **Request and receive a ballot application.** Requesting an absentee ballot application is the first step to vote by mail. After the application is completed and sent to the county registrar, the registrar will process the application. Assuming there are no problems with the ballot application, an official ballot will be mailed to the voter.
 1. How do I “request” a ballot application? Absentee ballot requests can be sent by mail, fax or email to local County Board of Elections offices. However, a completed ballot must be returned by mail or in person. You can find more info about absentee voting in Georgia [here](#).
 2. How do I “receive” a ballot application? County officials will send requests for ballots by mail. Recently, the Georgia Secretary of State’s office mailed ballot applications to all active voters—so active voters do not have to send a request for a ballot application.
 - ii. **Wait to receive your official ballot and send it back.** The official ballot is used to cast a vote. The ballot will list the candidates in the upcoming election. The voter will choose their candidates on the ballot and send the completed ballot back to the county. The ballot must be received no later than 7 p.m. on Election day, either by mail or in person, to be counted in that election.
- c. Will my absentee ballot application for May 19 still work for June 9?
 - i. In late March, local counties sent absentee ballot request forms to all active voters. These request forms were for the May 19 election. However, on April 9, the election was further delayed to June 9. The Secretary of State office has confirmed that any applications that were mailed for May 19 can be used for the June 9 election, even if they have the earlier date written on the form.
- d. Can I track my absentee ballot online?
 - i. **Yes.** Once an absentee ballot is requested and mailed, voters can track their own ballot via the My Voter Page [here](#). Voters may also call their local Boards of Elections to confirm a ballot has been received. Due to an increased amount of ballot requests, Boards may be slower to respond to questions.

- e. What if I have a mistake on my ballot when I receive it?
 - i. **Report it immediately.** Any mistake discovered on an absentee ballot should be reported to your local county Board of Elections office as quickly as possible. Contact information for your board or registrar can be found [here](#).
- f. What if I make a mistake on my ballot and mail it in?
 - i. **You cannot change your vote after you mail or send it in.** Voters cannot change their vote once they submit their ballots, even if they left the space blank. Voters who realize they may have left sections of their ballots blank or have changed their mind about a selection are NOT able to make changes to the ballot once it has been sent to the Board of Elections.
 - ii. **Some mistakes can be fixed after you send in your ballot.** If the Board of Election finds a mistake in the ballot that could keep it from being counted - such as missing a piece of required information like a signature - the Board will contact the voter by phone and/or mail to provide an opportunity to fix the mistake.
- g. Can I still select parties on my ballot?
 - i. **Yes.** Each ballot will include party preference because the June 9 election includes the Presidential Preference Primary candidates.

IV. You may need an ID to vote by mail.

- a. Only registered voters can vote by mail. If you registered to vote and did not submit a copy of one of the required forms of registration identification, you will receive a notice to provide ID with your ballot package. Copies of acceptable ID must be placed in the outer envelope with your ballot. Remember, ballots received after the polls close will not be counted.

V. All absentee ballot requests must be made by June 5 at the latest.

- a. All absentee ballot requests must be made by June 5. However, with the expected increased volume of requests, and the slow-down of U.S. Mail service due to Covid-19, it is strongly suggested that voters complete and return their absentee ballot request, and the ballot itself, as soon as possible.

VI. There is one primary election on June 9, and it will include the candidates from the previously scheduled March 24 and May 19 elections.

- a. Recap and FAQ:
 - i. **How do I get an absentee/vote by mail ballot?**

According to the Georgia Secretary of State, all active voters will receive an absentee ballot application in the mail. The Secretary of State's office was

scheduled to send these out no later than March 31. Any registered voter may fill out this request and return for a ballot to be mailed to them. You may also request an absentee ballot directly by logging into the My Voter Page [here](#).

How do I request an absentee/vote by mail ballot?

Absentee ballot requests can be sent by mail, fax or email to local County Board of Elections offices. However, a filled in ballot must be returned by mail or in person. You can find more info about absentee voting in Georgia [here](#).

What if I'm not an "active voter" will I still automatically receive a ballot application?

The Secretary of State's office will automatically mail absentee ballot applications to only active voters. All voters who are unsure about whether they are active or inactive should check their status [here](#). Registered voters can still request a ballot by logging into my voter page and requesting a ballot application [here](#). Whether or not the Secretary of State sends a voter a ballot application, any registered voter can still place a request for a ballot directly by logging into the My Voter Page [here](#).

What if I don't get/see my absentee application in the mail?

If you do not see your absentee ballot application in the mail, you can request a ballot application by logging into the My Voter Page [here](#), or by filling out a request and mailing it. You can find a copy of the request [here](#).

Is vote by mail secure?

Vote by mail is a secure alternative to voting in person. Follow the instructions on your ballot by sealing your personal information inside of the provided envelope and placing the envelope in an official USPS mailbox, or drop it off at your local county registrar. Your ballot information will be used to cast your vote. Keep in mind that with any piece of mail, it's possible for it to be lost if it is not placed in an official USPS mailbox. The best way to ensure that your ballot is safe is to follow the instructions on the envelope and to mail it back in an official USPS mailbox or deliver it directly to your county registrar.

Do I have to pay for postage to mail back my application and ballot?

Yes. As of now, a voter must pay their own postage to return a request (if sent via mail) or a completed ballot. Some local Boards of Elections may offer envelopes that are pre-paid, although not all locations have confirmed this is the case. Many organizations are working to change this process in order to make vote by mail more accessible.

Can I still vote early?

Yes. Early voting in person will still be available, although locations may be more limited than previous elections. Early voting begins May 18. Before going to vote in person, confirm your polling place by logging into the My Voter Page [here](#). Absentee ballots can also be sent in well ahead of the June 9 deadline, but will not be counted for the June 9 elections if received after Election Day.

What if I have a disability that makes it hard or impossible for me to fill out or send in a paper absentee ballot?

If you feel comfortable and are able, you can ask someone to help with your ballot application and ballot. If that is not an option, you may still vote in person on May 19.

Can I still vote in person?

Yes. Vote in person options will still be available both on Election Day and during early voting. Some county Boards of Election may choose to close and/or move polling places due to Covid-19 concerns. Before going to vote in person, confirm your polling place by logging into the My Voter Page [here](#).

If I vote in person, can I still vote in the same place?

While many polling places will remain open, some locations - especially those in senior centers - may be moved or closed. Before going to vote in person, confirm your polling place by logging into the My Voter Page [here](#).

What sanitary precautions are in place to lower the risk of exposure to COVID-19 for people who vote in person?

The Secretary of State's office is sending all counties cleaning supplies so that in-person voting can be as safe as possible. Polling places will be cleaned before and during in-person voting.

The COVID-19 Georgia Voter Guide: Vote by mail basics, FYIs, and FAQs was drafted in partnership with ProGeorgia Elections Administrations Working Group, who are dedicated to ensuring that the right to vote is available and accessible to all.

