

*A Guide for International Students
Driving in the United States*



International Student Services

College of the Atlantic

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Driving in the United States

In order to drive in the United States you must have a driver's license. You can either apply for a state license (in this case, a Maine Driver's License) or you can use your driver's license from your home country in addition to an International Driver's License, which translates the information from your original license. Please note that an International Driver's License is only valid for one year in the State of Maine. After that, you must apply for a State License.

* **You must carry your license(s) with you at all times when you drive.**

In order to own a car and drive in the United States, you need a license **and** car insurance. There are many affordable car insurance companies, but it is important to know what coverage they offer in case you do ever get involved in an accident. You will also need to carry proof of insurance with you at all times when driving.

→ Before you drive you also need to know specific road rules. They vary slightly from state to state, and even city to city (example: it is illegal to talk or text on a cell phone while driving in New York State; it is legal to talk in the State of Maine, but not text). Also make sure to check for parking restrictions.

How to apply for a driver's license in Maine

Wait 10 days after you arrive in the United States before starting the application process. You may want to apply for a driver's license right away, but be patient. The 10-day wait allows time for all the government databases to update with your arrival information.

Make sure you are eligible for a driver's license. The State of Maine requires for you to be here for at least 120 days beyond the day that you plan to get your license. This means that you plan to be at COA for at least a year to be eligible to get a driver's license.

The department that deals with all vehicle related issues in Maine is the Bureau of Motor Vehicles, or BMV for short.

A STEP BY STEP ON HOW TO START YOUR DRIVER'S LICENSE APPLICATION PROCESS:

→ **fill** out a noncommercial class C application:
<https://www.maine.gov/sos/bmv/forms/MVE%20-%2064.pdf>

→ **enclose with the application:**

- Two forms of ID; one must indicate date of birth and the other must bear your written signature. Your passport and social security number should do. Send photocopies of those (in case of the passport, photocopy the main information page and the visa page);
- A check or a money order payable to Secretary of State

→ mail all of the above to:

Secretary of State
Bureau of Motor Vehicles
Examination Section
State House Station 29
Augusta, ME 04333

→ it should take from two to three weeks for your application to be processed. After that, you will be contact in order to schedule a written test. This written task will be taken at the BMV. Here are some guides that should help you study for your written test:

- Maine Driver's Handbook (we have copies in the office as well!)
<http://driving-tests.org/maine/maine-drivers-handbook-online/>
- Online practice tests:
<http://driving-tests.org/maine/>
- The DMV genius app, that can be downloaded for the on the Apple app store or on google play:
<http://dmvgenius.com/>

→ the closest DMV is located in Ellsworth at the following address:

24 Church St. Ellsworth, ME 04605 Phone: (207) 667-9363.

WHEN YOU OBTAIN OR RENEW A DRIVER'S LICENSE (After you take the exam) YOU WILL NEED TO PROVE THE FOLLOWING:

- You are a Maine resident. Any of the following documents will work:
 - Maine ID
 - Contract in their name - mortgage agreement, lease, insurance policy, insurance ID card, SR22
 - State tax bill
 - Document issued by a government identity
 - State tax return
 - Paycheck stub
 - W-2
- You are a US citizen or are in the country lawfully
 - As an International Student, this requires your passport or visa, I-20, and also I-94

To obtain a driver's license you must successfully complete a driver knowledge examination and vision screening. To be eligible for a driver knowledge examination and driver road test, you must provide proof of identity.

In order to prove your identity, make sure to bring two of the following documents for proof of identification. One must indicate your date of birth and the other must bear your written signature:

- Birth certificate
- Driver's permit
- Passport
- School records/transcript (certified)
- Social Security Card

If you are at least 18 years old of age, your first license will be an adult provisional license for a period of two years. If you are at least 21 years of age, your first license will be an adult provisional license for a period of one year. If a person is convicted of a moving violation that occurred while operating with an adult provisional license, the license will be suspended for 30 days. A second offense in a 60 day suspension and a third offense or subsequent offense is a 90 day suspension.

Home Country licenses and International Driver's Permit

If the license is from your home country and is in a language other than English or Spanish, the license must be accompanied by an International Driver's Permit (IDP), which serves as an English translation of the international license. An IDP is not considered a valid license on its own, and must accompany a valid driver's license from the home country at all times. **IDP permits can only be obtained in the country which issued the actual license and are only valid for one year.**

HOW DO I GET AN IDP WITH A US DRIVER'S LICENSE?

1. Download and fill out application
<http://www.aaa.com/vacation/idpapplc.html>
2. A valid driver's license issued by the state's DMV
3. Two passport sized photos with your signature in the back
4. Payment for the applicable fee
5. You must be 18 years old or older
6. Bring all of the above to the nearest AAA Office

Ellsworth Branch:

130 Oak St 3

Ellsworth, ME 04605

(207) 667-6260

Bangor Branch:

339 Griffin Rd

Bangor, ME 04401

(207) 942-8287

When you go to your local BMV to apply for a driver's license, bring originals of the following documents:

- All signed versions of your I-20 form.
- Your printed electronic I-94 (unless you arrived overland from Canada, then your I-94 card)
- A valid passport with visa (You do not need a visa if you are from a visa-exempt country, such as Canada)
- Proof of residence. This varies from state to state and might be a bill or a letter addressed to you. The Coordinator of International Student Services can also provide this. Please allow for more than 24 hours for the office to issue this confirmation letter
- Your SSN or SSN card

CANADIAN STUDENTS

The rules for Canadian students are different. If you are a Canadian student with a valid Canadian driver's license, you can drive using this license in the United States. You can also convert your driver's license to a Maine driver's license during your first semester (if you know you will be here for a while and would like a valid US license). The Maine Bureau of Motor Vehicles does reserve the right to deny converting your license if you've been here for more than one semester.

The cost of driving without a license

WHAT HAPPENS IF I DON'T HAVE A LICENSE AND I DRIVE?

It is illegal to drive a car in the United States without a Driver's License.

If you drive a friend's car, and get in an accident/get into trouble, it is your friend who will be held liable and their insurance will likely go up. You might also pay a fine or get a ticket from the police.

If you drive your car without insurance and get pulled over by the police, you will have to pay hefty fines. Not only this, but you will be in legal trouble for having broken the law by driving without insurance.

IF YOU DRIVE A COA VEHICLE you need a valid license, but will be covered under COA's auto insurance policy.

THE COST OF AN ACCIDENT FOR AN UNINSURED DRIVER

While the legal penalties are very serious when it comes to driving without car insurance, you face even greater risk when you've been in an accident.

If you cause damage or injury to yourself, you obviously face the cost of dealing with those, and they can be high. However, if you were to cause injuries or property damage to another person(s), you could be held liable for those costs. You will be responsible for paying for any damage done to the car you were driving and the other person's car, as well as medical bills. Also, **the other driver can sue you for damages, such as negligence.**

If you don't have the amount of money to cover their costs, **your assets could be taken**, e.g., your possessions, home, car, etc. This can cause problems with your immigration status as it can often lead to legal issues.

The risk of driving without insurance is far too great. While the costs of premiums may seem high, consider the hit your finances could take if something happened while you were uninsured.