

The State of Maine offers the option of absentee voting for any registered voter, so you can cast a ballot without going to a voting place on Election Day.

You can request your ballot online or fill out an absentee ballot request application and send it to your municipal clerk. You can find the application on the Secretary of State's website. You can also call your town clerk directly to make a request over the telephone.

Be sure to make your request early enough to allow time for the ballot to arrive by mail.

Ballots are provided to town clerks 30 days prior to Election Day, and they begin mailing them out soon thereafter to those who requested to vote absentee.

When you receive your absentee ballot in the mail, you should first sign the return envelope in the "voter signature" line on the outer flap.

Depending on the election, you may receive multiple different ballots. Some ballots may have races and issues on both sides, so be sure to turn them over to complete voting.

To mark your choices on each ballot, fill in the oval next to your choice completely, using a ballpoint pen with black or blue ink. Do not make any other marks on your ballot.

When you have finished voting, refold your ballots and seal them in the return envelope. Doublecheck that you have signed the envelope and return your ballot to your town clerk. If you are returning the ballot by mail, you must affix the necessary first-class postage, and be sure to allow at least 7 days for delivery.

You can also deliver your ballot to your clerk in person or deposit it in the absentee ballot drop box at your town hall, if your municipality has that option.

Keep in mind that all ballots must be received by the municipal clerk no later than 8:00 p.m. on Election Day.

Voters can also fill out and submit an absentee ballot in person at your town or city clerk's office, up to 30 days prior to Election Day. The deadline for absentee voting in the presence of the clerk is the Thursday before the election, unless special circumstances exist.

IF YOU PLAN TO VOTE IN THE PRESENCE OF YOUR TOWN CLERK BEFORE ELECTION DAY, BE SURE TO CHECK WITH YOUR MUNICIPAL OFFICE REGARDING THEIR HOURS OF OPERATION AND PROCEDURES REGARDING PUBLIC ACCESS, AS THOSE MAY BE LIMITED DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC PRECAUTIONS.

Here's what happens to your ballot once it is received by your town clerk:

Absentee ballots are stored securely at your town clerk's office until the staff is ready to process them. Many towns process absentee ballots in advance of Election Day, while others process them on Election Day.

Your envelope will be opened by a team of election officials and your name will be checked off in the absentee tracking database, to confirm that your ballot has been received.

Ballots are left folded, so your actual votes are not visible to the election workers as they separate the ballots from the envelopes. The election officials will then flatten the piles of ballots, and each ballot is cast in the same manner as those on Election Day. In some towns, ballots are counted by hand, while others use a tabulator to gather all the results.

After polls close at 8 p.m. on Election Day, the absentee ballot tally is added to the total of votes cast in person, for a final result reflecting the will of all the voters. Absentee ballots are ALWAYS counted as long as they are received by the town by 8 p.m. on Election Day.

Voting by absentee ballot is an easy way to make sure you never miss a chance to make your voice heard in Maine's democratic process. If you have any questions, visit our website at maine.gov/sos or call our Elections Division at 207-624-7650.