

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE · CALIFORNIA

How to Get a Driver's License in California: 2026 Guide

For California newcomers, green card and visa holders, and drivers arriving with a foreign license: deadlines, tests, fees and DMV rules.

SHORT ANSWER

After you establish residency in California, you can drive on your previous license for no more than 10 days; after that you need a California license. That is far shorter than many states allow (Texas gives 90 days). The knowledge test is offered in English, Spanish, Armenian, Chinese, Farsi, Punjabi, Russian, Tagalog, Vietnamese and American Sign Language, not Turkish. Because California has no reciprocity agreement with any country, a Turkish license cannot be exchanged without testing. The fee is \$46.

Before you start

- **The deadline is short: 10 days.** California Vehicle Code §12505(c) lets new residents drive on a previous license for only 10 days after establishing residency. Do not assume the longer grace periods of other states (90 days in Texas) apply here.
- **Foreign licenses cannot be exchanged.** California has no reciprocity agreement with any country, so new residents go through the full process (knowledge test, vision test and, if required, a drive test), just like a first-time applicant.
- **The knowledge test is not offered in Turkish.** DMV's official page lists only English, Spanish, Armenian, Chinese, Farsi, Punjabi, Russian, Tagalog, Vietnamese and ASL. Some commercial test-prep sites online claim a Turkish option exists; that is not accurate.
- **There are three card types.** A standard license, REAL ID (required since May 7, 2025 for domestic flights and entry to federal buildings, at the same fee), and an AB 60 license for residents who cannot prove lawful presence (not REAL ID compliant and not valid federal ID).
- **Visitors** may drive in California on a valid Turkish license (Vehicle Code §12502); an International Driving Permit is not required but is recommended as an English translation aid.

Step by step

- 1 Find your nearest office at the DMV locator (dmv.ca.gov/portal/locations) and book your appointment on your first day in the state.
- 2 Gather your documents. REAL ID requires proof of identity (such as a passport or birth certificate), your Social Security number, and two residency documents.

- 3 Take the knowledge test on traffic laws and signs, in one of the ten listed languages (not Turkish).
- 4 Pass the vision test.
- 5 Take a drive test if required; the DMV will tell you whether you need one.
- 6 Pay the fee. A California license costs \$46.

Fees (2026)

ITEM	FEE
Driver's license, original/renewal	\$46
REAL ID, original/renewal	\$46 (no extra fee)
ID card	\$40
Reduced-fee ID card	\$11
Replacement / information change	\$37
Driving retest	\$9
Commercial license (Class A/B), original	\$100

What is an AB 60 license?

AB 60 is a license for California residents who cannot prove lawful presence; proof of identity and California residency is enough. An AB 60 card is not REAL ID compliant and cannot be used for a domestic flight or entry to a federal building. If your status changes later, you may be able to upgrade to a REAL ID.

NOTE FOR IMMIGRANTS

- California has no license-exchange agreement with any country, including Türkiye. The 10-day clock starts the moment you establish residency, so book a DMV appointment as soon as you have your residency documents in hand.
- A secondary source reported that Los Angeles-area appointment waits in 2026 ranged from 1 to 19 days depending on the office, averaging about 9 days. Check the official DMV scheduler for a current wait time.
- Answer the citizenship question on the form truthfully.** A false claim can seriously affect your immigration case.

Common mistakes

- Assuming another state's longer grace period applies in California.
- Showing up expecting a Turkish-language test.
- Thinking a Turkish license converts without testing.
- Assuming an AB 60 license works the same as a REAL ID.

- Leaving the DMV appointment until the last few days.



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