



Worried About Vote By Mail? Here's What You Can Do

Description

Illinois election officials are urging voters to cast ballots by mail to minimize risk of spreading COVID-19 from in-person voting. Millions of applications for mail ballots have been sent to voters. Hundreds of thousands of people have already returned them and expect to receive ballots starting Sept. 24.

Now the U.S. Post Office is warning that because of cost-cutting measures imposed in July, it might not be able to move the mail fast enough to meet the deadlines baked into the state's emergency elections law.

What can you do to make sure your vote is counted?

First, take a deep breath. The good thing about the new law is that it provides voters with multiple options. In addition to expanding vote by mail, the law includes an extended early voting period and allows (but doesn't require) local election authorities to provide secure drop boxes for those who don't trust the mail and don't feel safe voting in person.

Having so many options can be confusing, even before you factor in the misinformation floating around. You might have heard, for example, that absentee voting is secure and reliable, but vote-by-mail is not. In fact, they're the same thing. Several states have conducted their elections mostly by mail for years.

Illinois has had "no excuse absentee balloting"• another name for vote by mail • since 2006. Under the emergency law, which applies to the Nov. 3 election only, applications for those ballots were automatically sent to anyone who'd voted in any of the last three elections.

You may have seen a social media meme declaring that "Election Day is Oct. 20."• The intended message is that you should mail your ballot two weeks before Election Day because it won't be counted if it arrives Nov. 4 or later. This isn't strictly true in Illinois, where ballots must be postmarked by Nov. 3 and received within 14 days after.

That doesn't mean the postal delays aren't a factor, though. The temporary law allows voters to request a ballot as late as Oct. 29. Does that allow time for the voter to receive the ballot and send it

back postmarked by Nov. 3? Donâ??t count on it.

If you didnâ??t automatically receive a ballot application, thereâ??s still plenty of time to request one [here](#). Once you receive your ballot, returning it promptly will erase worries about transit time. It also gives election authorities more time to process it.

You also can hand deliver your mail ballot to an early voting site or take it to a secure drop box. A drop box is an especially good option closer to Election Day, if you havenâ??t yet mailed your ballot. Now would be a good time to lobby your local election authority to provide drop boxes if thatâ??s not already part of the plan. (Chicago and Cook County plan to have drop boxes at all early voting sites.)

Of course you can still cast a ballot in person at an early voting site or your regular Election Day polling place. This is true even if youâ??ve received a mail ballot â?? just take it with you and surrender it. Because itâ??s impossible to predict what COVID-19 will look like by November, itâ??s smart to get a mail ballot as insurance even if your plan is to vote in person.

Not everyone can vote by mail (and not everyone wants to). The new law includes provisions to make in-person voting safer. Nov. 3 will be a state holiday, so schools and government buildings can be used as socially distanced polling places. But the more people who vote early or by mail, the smaller the crowds on Election Day. With a little preparation, you can cast your ballot safely and with confidence.

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