

# Adoptive Families

## Post-Adoption Paperwork for International Adoptions

**Y**ou filled out your share of forms during the process to adopt. Now that your child is home...there's a bit more paperwork to wade through. Here's how to obtain the documents you need to verify that the adoption is final and that your child is a legal U.S. citizen.

### READoption

**What it is:** Readoption is a means of documenting the parent-child relationship under U.S. law. Readoption can ensure inheritance rights for the child, and, in many states, it is the first step in obtaining a state birth certificate and legal name change.

An IR-3 or IH-3 visa means that both parents physically saw the child, and that a full and final adoption was completed in the child's country of origin. With either of these visas, readoption is usually optional (you might readopt if your state does not, under statute, recognize foreign adoption decrees). If your child entered the U.S. on an IR-4 or IH-4 visa, readoption is mandatory.

**What you need:** Check the stamp in your child's passport to see what type of visa he or she came into the country on. Most states require the original foreign adoption decree (make copies!) to be filed with the readoption petition.

**How to proceed:** Readoption is based on state, not federal, law, so the process can vary widely. In some states, it can be a simple matter of filling out a form and paying a fee. In others, it's a complicated process that you may need an attorney to navigate. Look up your state's laws at the Child Welfare Information Gateway ([childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws\\_policies/state](http://childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/state)). You can find an adoption attorney through the American Academy of Adoption Attorneys ([adoptionattorneys.org](http://adoptionattorneys.org)).

### CERTIFICATE OF CITIZENSHIP

**What it is:** A Certificate of Citizenship (COC) may be required to apply for scholarships, work in government jobs or overseas, and obtain a passport, or if your child ever needs to provide proof of his U.S. citizenship. *Every* child born outside the U.S. should have a COC.

**What you need:** If you readopted, you must submit proof of the readoption. In addition to the standard documents listed on U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services form N-600 ([uscis.gov/files/form/N-600.pdf](http://uscis.gov/files/form/N-600.pdf)), you'll need to supply three identical, passport-style, color photos of the applicant.

**How to proceed:** Children with IR-3 or IH-3 visas legally become U.S. citizens upon entering the country. You should automatically receive the COC in the mail within 45 days. (If you don't, contact USCIS at 800-375-5283.) If your child entered the U.S. with an IR-4 or IH-4 visa, you must file for the COC after you readopt. **Legal-eaze.com** offers clear (and free) instructions on this process.

If you change your child's name, you can file for an updated COC by filling out form N-565 ([uscis.gov/files/form/N-565.pdf](http://uscis.gov/files/form/N-565.pdf)).

### Birth Certificate

**What it is:** Copies of birth certificates are often requested when filling out school or sports-team forms, so you'll want one in English listing you (and your partner) as your child's parent(s), along with the correct spelling of the child's name. A U.S. birth certificate is easier to replace than one issued by a foreign country.

**What you need:** If readoption is mandatory for you, you must complete the readoption process before you can request a birth certificate. Most states require a copy of your child's original birth certificate from his or her country of origin.

**How to proceed:** If you're readopting, you can request a birth certificate from your state as part of the process. If you choose not to readopt, most state registrars will issue a birth certificate to parents who furnish a copy of the adoption decree and proof of the child's date and location of birth. Look up your state's requirements at [childwelfare.gov](http://childwelfare.gov).

## PASSPORT

**What it is:** It is not a proof of citizenship, but a passport permits your child to travel outside the country and, most important, serves as additional documentation of your child's legal status.

**What you need:** Complete Form DS-11 at [travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/passports/new.html#step1](http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/passports/new.html#step1). Children under 16 must apply in person (with a parent) at a

State Department passport office or a U.S. post office. You'll have to submit two passport photos with the completed application.

**How to proceed:** Apply for a passport after you receive your child's COC. The wait is generally three weeks, though times vary during the year. Submit the application after you've finalized the rest of your post-adoption paperwork, so that the passport will contain up-to-date information.

## NAME CHANGE

**What it is:** Most international adoption proceedings allow you to change your child's name on the adoption decree. If your proceedings did not include this step, if the child's new name is misspelled on the adoption decree, or if the decree includes incorrect information (Latin-American courts may use the adoptive mother's, rather than the father's, last name), you should request a name

change when you readopt.

**What you need:** A name change after a completed adoption requires filing your state's legal name change form (from your county clerk's office) and going to court to make your request.

**How to proceed:** If you don't readopt and want to change your child's name after finalizing the adoption, visit [namechangelaw.com](http://namechangelaw.com) to learn about your state's procedures.

## SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER

**What it is:** You might be tempted to hold off on applying for a Social Security Number (SSN), thinking that your child won't need access to benefits like work and student-loan eligibility or retirement income for years to come. Don't wait: You'll need your

child's SSN to apply for the Adoption Tax Credit on your tax return. Most school and medical forms will ask for this information, as well.

**What you need:** Two documents proving the child's identity, age, and U.S. citizenship, and one proof of identity from the applicant/parent.

**How to proceed:** Complete the Social Security card application ([social](http://socialsecurity.gov/online/ss-5.pdf)

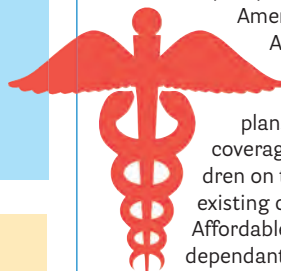
## Health Insurance

"A 1996 federal law eliminated the requirement that the adoption be finalized in court before there is coverage on employer-sponsored plans," says Mark McDermott, Esq., an adoptive parent and past president of the

American Academy of Adoption Attorneys.

"It also prohibits carriers of those plans from restricting coverage of adopted children on the basis of a pre-existing condition. The Affordable Care Act extended dependant coverage until age 26, and defines "child" as including "adopted children (including children lawfully placed for adoption) and eligible foster children."

Thus, enrolling your child in your health-insurance plan should be as simple as making a phone call and sending your carrier a copy of the adoption decree. If the carrier hassles you about the start date or pre-existing conditions, citing the law will usually settle the matter. Consult an attorney if you encounter problems.



## Quick Tip

One good reason to start your post-adoption paperwork sooner rather than later: You'll still have most of what you'll need close at hand. When filling out most of these forms, you must furnish the same type of documents you gathered for your dossier: marriage (and, if applicable, divorce) certificates, parents' birth certificates, and income verification.

Compiled by the editors of *Adoptive Families*, with the assistance of Peter Wiernicki, Esq., Mark McDermott, Esq., and freelance writer and editor Skila Brown.

## G-884 FORM

**What it is:** Your child is entitled to original documents concerning his immigration and adoption process. (Remember that sealed envelope you handed over at airport immigration?)

**What you need:** Two forms of ID along with a notarized G-884 form. There is no filing fee.

**How to proceed:** Complete the G-884 form (<http://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/files/form/g-884.pdf>). Be very specific about what you are asking for: "all photos or other docu-

ments concerning my child's adoption." If your child entered the U.S. with an IR-3 visa, contact the Buffalo, New York, USCIS office ([child-citizenship-act@dhs.gov](mailto:child-citizenship-act@dhs.gov) or 716-843-7903). They will tell you where to mail the completed form. If your child entered the country with an IR-4 visa, contact the USCIS office that processed your child's immigration.

There may be some paperwork (such as the birth mother's birth certificate) that can't be sent from the G-884. Request it by filing a **G-639 Form** ([uscis.gov/sites/default/files/files/form/g-639.pdf](http://uscis.gov/sites/default/files/files/form/g-639.pdf)).