

RED, WHITE, & BLUE

SEA SANDS SKIES

AN AMERICAN CITIZEN SERVICES NEWSLETTER

• July - September 2020 •



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From the Desk of the Minister Counselor for Consular Affairs



Belated, but sincere best wishes on the occasion of U.S. Independence Day, on behalf of the consular team at Embassy Riyadh and Consulates General Jeddah and Dhahran. This is obviously a challenging time for our country, but perhaps for that reason it is all the more important that we pause and reflect on the distance traveled and the progress achieved as a people and a nation since July 4, 1776.

Saudi Arabia, like most of the rest of the world, continues to grapple with the immediate impact and far-reaching consequences of the COVID-19 virus. All curfew and movement restrictions have been lifted and limited domestic air service has been restored, but international air service remains suspended and borders remain closed. We don't know when these conditions might change, but as always, be sure to register in the STEP program and follow us on Twitter for the latest developments. While much of the Kingdom has opened up, COVID-19 remains an enormous challenge for all us. The sustained community transmission of the virus has placed significant strain on the Saudi medical system and made access to care more difficult. As you know, on June 26, the Department of State authorized the voluntary departure of all families and non-emergency personnel assigned to Mission Saudi Arabia. We encourage all Americans, especially those with underlying medical conditions or who are at high-risk for the COVID-19 virus, to consider whether it may be advisable for them to take an upcoming repatriation flight, taking conditions in the Kingdom and at their final destination in the United States into account when making that decision. I am proud of the efforts Mission Saudi Arabia's consular team has made to facilitate the repatriation of thousands of American citizens from Saudi Arabia – and most recently, from Yemen – during this difficult period when regular commercial air service is not available.

Hajj season is almost upon us. It will, of course, be a much different, much smaller Hajj this year due to COVID-19. If you are considering participating, please be sure to review the Hajj-specific guidance on the Mission's [COVID-19 Information page](#).

Finally, on a personal note, I will be concluding my assignment in Riyadh this month and will transfer to U.S. Embassy Abu Dhabi. It has been a great honor and a pleasure to serve the American community in Saudi Arabia for the past three years. My successor, Michael Garcia, is coming to the Kingdom by way of the U.S. Embassy in Buenos Aires. I know you will be as supportive of Mike as you have been of me, and that he will enjoy working with you as much as I have. My best wishes to all of you. God bless America.

Sean Murphy

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REGISTER FOR STEP

The Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) is a free service for Americans to enroll their trip with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate.

<https://step.state.gov/STEP>

Stay Informed, Stay Connected, Stay Safe!



SIGN UP FOR SMS ALERTS

If you wish to receive important announcements via text message enroll in our SMS alert system at:

[https:// Tinyurl.com/USKSAAAlerts](https://Tinyurl.com/USKSAAAlerts)

Messaging and Data Rates May Apply



UPDATE ON COVID-19

The Saudi Ministry of Health provides an updated account of daily and cumulative numbers of COVID-19 cases across the Kingdom. The [website](#) is available in English and Arabic. In response to the pandemic, new laws have been imposed requiring face masks in public places, temperature checks when entering public and private sector facilities, and strict adherence to social distancing requirements. Violations can result in fines of 1000 Riyals (\$266).

The U.S. Mission in Saudi Arabia urges American citizens to register in the [STEP program](#), follow the U.S. Mission American Citizen Services Twitter account, and monitor the U.S. Embassy website COVID-19 information page.

Saudi Arabia has widespread, sustained community transmission of COVID-19, and access to healthcare is limited, as outlined in our June 7 Health Alert. To learn more about how to protect yourself and your family, you can review CDC guidelines [here](#).

NEWS ON VISAS

On July 5, the Saudi Ministry of the Interior announced a three-month extension of iqamas (residency permits) and visas, free of charge, for the following visa types:

- Expired iqamas or exit and reentry visas for expats who have been unable to return to the Kingdom during the travel restrictions;
- Iqamas for expats inside the Kingdom;
- Visitor visas for non-residents inside Saudi Arabia; and
- Final exit visas and exit and reentry visas issued for expats who were unable to travel during the lockdown period.

On June 23, the General Directorate of Passports (Jawazat) announced that expats outside of Saudi Arabia will be allowed to return after the end of the pandemic. The process for returning has not yet been announced.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Saudi Arabia continues to face the threat of missile and drone attack. If you hear a loud explosion or if civil defense sirens are activated, immediately seek cover.

If in a home or a building, go to the lowest level of the structure with the fewest exterior walls, windows, and openings; close any doors and sit near an interior wall, away from any windows or openings.

If you are outdoors, immediately seek cover in a hardened structure; if that is not possible, lie down and cover your head with your hands. Be aware that even if the incoming missile or drone is intercepted, falling debris represents a significant risk. After the attack, stay away from any debris, and monitor major news outlets for official guidance.

Being prepared is a part of who you are. Disaster preparation is no different.



[READY.GOV/MYPLAN](https://www.ready.gov/myplan)

ACS ACROSS KSA



Beginning in April, U.S. Embassy Riyadh began hosting regular COVID-19 virtual town halls with our Consular Liaison Volunteers (CLVs) across Saudi Arabia. Over the last three months, we have conducted six sessions with approximately 60 CLVs participating in each session. We are fortunate to have such a strong community of CLVs across the Kingdom. They work in a variety of fields, including medical, defense, and education sectors, and they provide voluntary assistance to our fellow Americans. They also help support the American Citizen Services Units by pushing out information to their local American communities in Saudi Arabia and by reporting trends and problems. These town halls allowed our CLVs to share information with Ambassador Abizaid; Consuls General from Jeddah and Dhahran; the Centers for Disease Control country director; the Embassy's Regional Medical Officer; and our consular team. Discussions focused on COVID-19's impact on American citizens and the Mission's ongoing response. If you are interested in reaching out to a CLV in your area, please contact your nearest embassy or consulate.

Update on Current U.S. Passport Operations

On Thursday, June 11, various passport agencies and centers entered Phase One of their COVID-19 reopening plan, allowing them to resume printing. Applications will be processed on a first in, first out basis, beginning with the oldest applications received. During Phase One, the State Department continues to recommend customers wait to submit new or renewal applications as delays will continue.

Appointments at U.S. Embassy Riyadh and U.S. Consulates General Jeddah and Dhahran



American Citizen Service Units continue to provide emergency services to U.S. citizens, including processing emergency passport applications. Appointment requests should be made by email. If you have urgent travel or another crucial need for a passport, such as renewing an iqama, please contact our office. For routine renewals, please contact us once normal appointments resume. Our turnaround time on issuing emergency passports is very fast, and we can typically provide them the same day as your appointment.

Repatriation Flights

The Department of State is rising to meet the historic challenge posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, every day, all over the world. The U.S. Government has no higher priority than the protection of American citizens.

The U.S. Department of State has coordinated the repatriation of over 102,000 Americans on more than 1,140 flights from 136 countries and territories.



*"Thank you for keeping us posted and continuously helping us... [you are] giving us comfort that our Embassy and Consulates care."
-H.S.*

Evacuation flights continue all over the world.



We are still working to bring Americans home.

The U.S. Mission in Saudi Arabia has helped more than 3,500 citizens and Lawful Permanent Residents return home on nearly 40 repatriation flights across the Kingdom. Additionally, since Saudi Arabia implemented COVID-19 restrictions in March, the U.S. Mission in Saudi Arabia has responded to thousands of emails and phone calls, distributed Health Alerts and tweeted regular updates, held frequent Consular Liaison Volunteer virtual meetings, and provided emergency services and repatriation loans for Americans who would otherwise not be able to return home.

*"I am so glad to be back at home and be reunited with my family.... Thanks again for your timely and highly relevant and effective support."
-A.A.A.*

We continue to proudly serve the American community in Saudi Arabia. We thank you for your continued support and flexibility as we all navigate this unprecedented time together.



Before You Depart

- You must have a valid passport in order to travel.
- Travelers who are not U.S. citizens must have legal means to enter the United States, for example, a valid LPR card or a valid U.S. visa.
- You must have authorization to leave the country. Please see our previous [Health Alert](#) on this topic. Business and family visit visa holders generally do not require additional authorization to depart.
- You must settle all liabilities and legal actions prior to departure. Expressing interest in a flight and purchasing a ticket does not guarantee that you will be allowed to board if you do not meet documentary requirements.
- Before you depart, you must make arrangements for onward travel in the United States, if applicable to your plans.
- If you have a temperature or flu-like symptoms, you will not be allowed to fly and should not come to the airport.
- Repatriation flights coordinated by Mission Saudi Arabia are one-way flights. We cannot guarantee when you will be able to re-enter Saudi Arabia. We do not arrange return travel.
- As you prepare for the flight, consider bringing additional food with you for the trip. Due to health and safety considerations, the airline may not be able to provide their normal complement of meals or their standard meal service options.

Staying Healthy On Board

- Consider purchasing a small bottle of hand sanitizer and a small pack of disinfectant wipes before your flight. When you board the plane, you can use the disinfectant wipes to thoroughly clean ALL the surfaces you may touch – the TV screen, the remote, tray table, seat belt, seat belt buckle – and keep the hand sanitizer within easy reach. Make sure to use it before eating, drinking, or touching your face.
- Keep your air vent turned on high. The air that vents out is purified through a HEPA filter. Consider taking natural tears eye drops with you to use if your eyes get dry.
- Wear a mask. Cloth masks are meant to protect others around you from being exposed to your respiratory droplets. They will not prevent you from being exposed to droplets from others. Wear your mask appropriately. Once you put on the mask, do not fiddle with it to readjust, and do not remove it except to eat or drink. Replace with a new mask after you remove for meals.

HOW TO VOTE FROM ANYWHERE IN 2 Simple Steps...

WHEN YOU'RE AN AMERICAN OVERSEAS

ACROSS THE POND? NO MATTER WHERE YOU ARE, YOU CAN VOTE.

If you're an American living abroad, you can have your absentee ballot sent to you.

HERE'S HOW:

STEP
1

FILL OUT THE **FEDERAL POST CARD APPLICATION (FPCA) AT FVAP.GOV TO REGISTER AND REQUEST YOUR BALLOT**

WHEN?

Send it to your election office by August 1* (or later depending on your state) for the General Election on November 3, 2020.

STEP
2

FILL OUT AND SEND IN YOUR BALLOT WHEN IT ARRIVES

WHEN?

By the recommended deadline of **OCTOBER 13, 2020**.

WHAT IF THE BALLOT DOESN'T ARRIVE IN TIME TO FILL OUT AND SEND BACK BY THE DEADLINE?

Use the *Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB)* as a backup ballot at FVAP.gov.

WANT TO MAKE SURE YOUR BALLOT WAS RECEIVED?

Check the status at FVAP.gov.

THAT'S IT. YOU'RE AN OVERSEAS VOTER.

GET MORE INFO AND ASSISTANCE AT [FVAP.GOV](https://fvap.gov)



FVAP.gov
FEDERAL VOTING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

What's in the ACS Mailbox?

Q: Will there be repatriation flights in August or September? When will commercial service resume?

A: All future flights will be announced via the STEP system and through the Mission's website and American Citizen Services Twitter account. Resumption of routine commercial service will be announced by the Saudi Government.

Q: My spouse is not a U.S. citizen. Can he accompany me on a repatriation flight?

A: Travelers with valid visas, including immigrant visas and Lawful Permanent Residents, may book tickets on any upcoming flight; however, please be aware that if you travel on a tourist visa, you must be able to prove to the satisfaction of a United States Customs and Border Protection officer that you have clear non-immigrant intent. Tourist visas are issued to foreign nationals seeking to enter the United States on a temporary basis for tourism, business, medical treatment, or certain other purposes. Given that there are currently no return flights for non-Saudis to Saudi Arabia, you may face an additional burden in proving that your travel to the United States is not for the intent to immigrate.

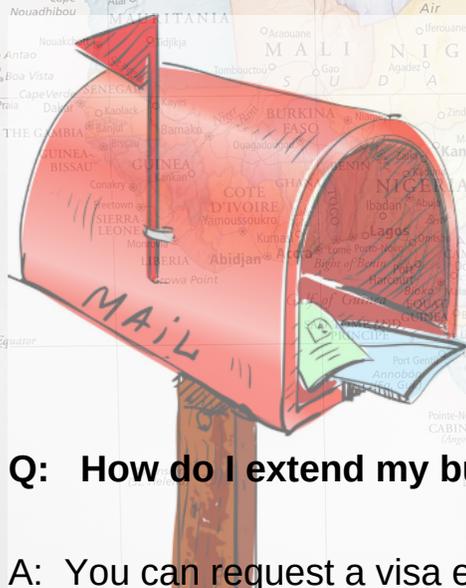


Q: Can I file my taxes at the U.S. Embassy or U.S. Consulates?

A: No, you cannot file your taxes at the U.S. Embassy or Consulates. Tax returns can be mailed to the Internal Revenue Agency or you can file your tax returns electronically.

Q: How do I extend my business visa and my spouse's tourist visa?

A: You can request a visa extension via the Ministry of Interior website or in person at the General Directorate of Passports (Jawazat) office nearest you. Per the Saudi tourism board, extensions are not required for tourist visas that expired following the suspension of international flights. Specific questions regarding visa status should be directed to the Ministry of the Interior at 922 (in Saudi Arabia), or +966 920 000 890 from outside the kingdom.



Tax Day is now July 15

If you need assistance, please contact [IRS.gov](https://www.irs.gov) or please see the lists of tax specialists collected [here](#).



UNPAID TAXES MAY RESULT IN REVOCATION OR DENIAL OF A PASSPORT



If you have seriously delinquent tax debt, IRC § 7345 authorizes the IRS to certify that debt to the State Department for action. The State Department generally will not issue a passport to you after receiving certification from the IRS.

Upon receiving certification, the State Department will deny your passport application and/or may revoke your current passport. If your passport application is denied or your passport revoked and you are overseas, the State Department may issue you a limited validity passport good only for direct return to the United States.

You can find more information on the Internal Revenue Service's website.



ECONOMIC IMPACT PAYMENTS: ARE YOU ELIGIBLE?

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) authorized Economic Impact Payments (EIP) to millions of U.S. citizens and residents. The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) continues to calculate and automatically send EIP to eligible individuals.

*Both filers and non-filers may be eligible for economic impact payments; more information is available on the [IRS website](#). U.S. citizens living outside the country **are** eligible for the Payment. Anyone eligible to file Form 1040 or Form 1040-SR is an eligible person if they have a valid Social Security Number and can't be claimed as a dependent of another taxpayer.*

Nonresident aliens who file or would file Form 1040-NR or Form 1040-NR-EZ are not eligible for the Payment.

SAFETY & SECURITY



UPDATED TRAVEL ADVISORY

On June 26, 2020, the Department of State authorized the voluntary departure of non-emergency U.S. personnel and family members from the U.S. Mission to Saudi Arabia due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Global Travel Advisory from March 19, 2020 remains in place and citizens are advised not to travel at this time. For more information, please visit:

<https://sa.usembassy.gov/security-alert-authorized-departure-for-department-of-state-employees/>



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE BUREAU OF CONSULAR AFFAIRS INSTAGRAM

Follow @travelgov on Instagram for travel tips and safety resources to help you make informed decisions regarding travel, and enjoy photos of amazing locations around the world:

[@travelgov](https://www.instagram.com/travelgov)

FOLLOW US ON TWITTER

In addition to the STEP messages we send via email, we post safety and security information on Twitter, as well as helpful information for U.S. citizens living in Saudi Arabia. To stay up-to-date on the latest ACS news, follow us:

[@KSA_ACS](https://twitter.com/KSA_ACS)

**FOLLOW
US!**

UPCOMING CLOSURES

The U.S. Embassy and
Consulates in Saudi
Arabia will be closed:

AUG. 2-6

HAJJ/EID - AL - ADHA

SEPT. 6

IN OBSERVANCE OF LABOR
DAY

SEPT. 23

SAUDI NATIONAL DAY

OCT. 11

IN OBSERVANCE
OF COLUMBUS DAY



Find us online at:

[https://sa.usembassy.gov/
u-s-citizen-services/](https://sa.usembassy.gov/u-s-citizen-services/)



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