On many occasions we have to provide a birth certificate for proof of identity or to obtain official documents. But what does a birth certificate prove?

A certified birth certificate is an official government-issued record of a person’s birth, printed on security paper and includes an official raised, embossed, impressed or multicolored seal. This is different than the copy that may be provided by the hospital, which may have the baby’s footprints as a special keepsake, but is not valid for legal purposes.

An official birth certificate will include personal information about the individual, such as their:

- Full Name (first, last, and middle)
- Age, Sex, Race
- Date and Place of birth
- Parent’s names, ages, and places of birth
- Name and address of the attending physician or midwife

Not all birth certificates look the same. Some states may require more or less data than shown above, and some information may have been incomplete at the time the birth certificate was issued. However, because of the personal and sensitive nature of information included on a birth certificate, they should always be kept secure.

**When Do I Need a Birth Certificate?**

Certified birth certificates are used for a variety of legal purposes, including obtaining passports or driver’s licenses (or other forms of government-issued identification). However, there are other reasons a birth certificate may be necessary:

- School registration
- Signing up for youth sports programs
- Domestic or international adoption
- Employment
- Genealogy and/or family history
- Marriage (domestic and international)
- Access to other personal records
How Do I Order a Birth Certificate?

Birth certificates are only issued by an official State, County, or City/Township government office authorized to issue such documents, where the person was born. This may include State Vital Records or Statistics Offices, County Departments of Health, Public Health Departments, County Clerks and/or Recorders Offices, County Probate Offices, City or Town Clerks Offices, City Hall Offices, etc.

You may order a birth certificate directly from the appropriate government office as noted above, or you may be able to request a copy through a third-party service provider. However, make sure the service is from a reputable company. If it’s an approved source, the Agency will typically have a link to that provider on their website.

Most Agencies will provide a way to order a birth certificate online, as well as in-person, by telephone, and/or by mail-in application – check their website for available ordering methods. When ordering certificates online, the following tips can help ensure your order is processed promptly:

- Enter your application information carefully and double-check spelling and dates.
- Provide up-to-date contact information (telephone number and e-mail address that you monitor regularly), just in case someone needs to contact you or verify information.
- Read all information thoroughly to ensure you can legally receive the document.
- Have additional documentation available if needed. In certain situations, a copy of your government-issued photo identification (ID) or a sworn, notarized statement may be required by the agency issuing the birth certificate before it can be sent.

Because birth certificates include information that is considered sensitive and personal, they are generally not public documents. However, some Agencies may make certain historical birth certificates publically available, as they contain less sensitive information than certified or official birth certificates.