

United States Citizenship by Birth or Through Parents

You may already be a United States citizen and not know it.

United States citizenship can be obtained in one of four ways:

- *birth in the United States or its territories*
- *birth to United States citizen parents*
- *naturalization (the grant of citizenship after an application and exam), or*
- *naturalization of one's parents.*

If you were born on United States soil, were born to United States citizen parents, or became a naturalized United States citizen and you have been living in the United States, you clearly have United States citizenship. But many people are United States citizens and don't know it. Most fall into one of three groups:

People born in the United States who have lived most of their lives in other countries. If you fall into this category, you may mistakenly believe that your long absence from the country, plus voting or military activities elsewhere, have stripped you of United States citizenship. This is not the case.

People who have United States citizens in their direct line of ancestry. If you have direct ancestors who were United States citizens, you may not realize that United States citizenship has been passed down the line, even if you were born elsewhere and your ancestors have not lived in the United States for a long time.

Children of naturalized United States citizens who were never themselves naturalized. Children under the age of 18 cannot normally become naturalized United States citizens. However, when parents become naturalized, minor children with green cards gain United States citizenship automatically.