

Visited on 08/06/2019



IRS kicks off 2019 tax-filing season as tax agency reopens; Use IRS.gov to avoid phone delays

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WASHINGTON — The Internal Revenue Service successfully opened the 2019 tax-filing season today as the agency started accepting and processing federal tax returns for tax year 2018. Despite the major tax law changes made by the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, the IRS was able to open this year's tax-filing season one day earlier than the 2018 tax-filing season.

More than 150 million individual tax returns for the 2018 tax year are expected to be filed, with the vast majority of those coming before the April tax deadline. Through mid-day Monday, the IRS had already received several million tax returns during the busy opening hours.

"I am extremely proud of the entire IRS workforce. The dedicated IRS employees have worked tirelessly to successfully implement the biggest tax law changes in 30 years and launch tax season for the nation," said IRS Commissioner Chuck Rettig. "Although we face various near- and longer-term challenges, our employees are committed to doing everything we can to help taxpayers and get refunds out quickly."

Following the government shutdown, the IRS is working to promptly resume normal operations.

"The IRS will be doing everything it can to have a smooth filing season," Rettig said. "Taxpayers can minimize errors and speed refunds by using e-file and IRS Free File along with direct deposit."

The IRS expects the first refunds to go out in the first week of February and many refunds to be paid by mid- to late February like previous years. The IRS reminds taxpayers to check "[Where's My Refund?](#)" for updates. Demand on IRS phones during the early weeks of tax season is traditionally heavy, so taxpayers are encouraged to use IRS.gov to find answers before they call.

April deadline; help for taxpayers through e-file, Free File

The filing deadline to submit 2018 tax returns is Monday, April 15, 2019, for most taxpayers. Because of the Patriots' Day holiday on April 15 in Maine and Massachusetts and the Emancipation Day holiday on April 16 in the District of Columbia, taxpayers who live in Maine or Massachusetts have until April 17 to file their returns.

With major changes made by the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, the IRS encouraged taxpayers seeking more information on tax reform to consult two online resources: [Publication 5307](#), Tax Reform:

Visited on 08/06/2019

Basics for Individuals and Families, and [Publication 5318](#), Tax Reform What's New for Your Business. For other tips and resources, visit [IRS.gov/taxreform](#) or check out the [Get Ready](#) page on IRS.gov.

The IRS expects about 90 percent of returns to be filed electronically. Choosing [e-file](#) and [direct deposit](#) remains the fastest and safest way to file an accurate income tax return and receive a refund.

The [IRS Free File](#) program, available at IRS.gov, gives eligible taxpayers a dozen options for filing and preparing their tax returns using brand-name products. IRS Free File is a partnership with commercial partners offering free brand-name software to about 100 million individuals and families with incomes of \$66,000 or less. About 70 percent of the nation's taxpayers are eligible for IRS Free File. People who earned more than \$66,000 may use Free File Fillable Forms, the electronic version of IRS paper forms.

Most refunds sent in less than 21 days; EITC/ACTC refunds starting Feb. 27

The IRS expects to issue more than nine out of 10 refunds in less than 21 days. However, it's possible a tax return may require additional review and take longer. ["Where's My Refund?"](#) has the most up to date information available about refunds. The tool is updated only once a day, so taxpayers don't need to check more often.

The IRS also notes that refunds, by law, cannot be issued before Feb. 15 for tax returns that claim the Earned Income Tax Credit or the Additional Child Tax Credit. This applies to the entire refund — even the portion not associated with the EITC and ACTC. While the IRS will process the EITC and ACTC returns when received, these refunds cannot be issued before Feb. 15. Similar to last year, the IRS expects the earliest EITC/ACTC related refunds to actually be available in taxpayer bank accounts or on debit cards starting on Feb. 27, 2019, if they chose direct deposit and there are no other issues with the tax return.

["Where's My Refund?"](#) on IRS.gov and the [IRS2Go mobile app](#) remain the best way to check the status of a refund. ["Where's My Refund?"](#) will be updated with projected deposit dates for most early EITC and ACTC refund filers on Feb. 23, so those filers will not see a refund date on ["Where's My Refund?"](#) or through their software packages until then. The IRS, tax preparers and tax software will not have additional information on refund dates, so these filers should not contact or call about refunds before the end of February.

This law was changed to give the IRS more time to detect and prevent fraud. Even with the EITC and ACTC refunds and the additional security safeguards, the IRS still expects to issue more than nine out of 10 refunds in less than 21 days. However, it's possible a particular tax return may require additional review and a refund could take longer. Even so, taxpayers and tax return preparers should file when they're ready. For those who usually file early in the year and are ready to file a complete and accurate return, there is no need to wait to file.

New Form 1040

Visited on 08/06/2019

Form 1040 has been redesigned for tax year 2018. The revised form consolidates Forms 1040, 1040A and 1040-EZ into one form that all individual taxpayers will use to file their 2018 federal income tax return.

The new form uses a “building block” approach that can be supplemented with additional schedules as needed. Taxpayers with straightforward tax situations will only need to file the Form 1040 with no additional schedules. People who use tax software will still follow the steps they’re familiar with from previous years. Since nearly 90 percent of taxpayers now use tax software, the IRS expects the change to Form 1040 and its schedules to be seamless for those who e-file.

Free tax help

Low- and moderate-income taxpayers can get help filing their tax returns for free. Tens of thousands of volunteers around the country can help people correctly complete their returns.

To get this help, taxpayers can visit one of the more than 12,000 community-based tax help sites that participate in the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) and Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE) programs. To find the nearest site, use the [VITA/TCE Site Locator](#) on IRS.gov or the IRS2Go mobile app.

Filing assistance

No matter who prepares a federal tax return, by signing the return, the taxpayer becomes legally responsible for the accuracy of all information included. IRS.gov offers a number of [tips about selecting a preparer](#) and information about [national tax professional groups](#).

The IRS urges all taxpayers to make sure they have all their year-end statements in hand before filing. This includes Forms W-2 from employers and Forms 1099 from banks and other payers. Doing so will help avoid refund delays and the need to file an amended return.

Online tools

The IRS reminds taxpayers they have a variety of options to get help filing and preparing their tax returns on IRS.gov, the official IRS website. Taxpayers can find answers to their tax questions and resolve tax issues online. The [Let Us Help You](#) page helps answer most tax questions, and the [IRS Services Guide](#) links to these and other IRS services.

Taxpayers can go to [View Your Account Information](#) to securely access information about their federal tax account. They can view the amount they owe, pay online or set up an online payment agreement; access their tax records online; review the past 18 months of payment history; and view key tax return information for the current year as filed. Visit [IRS.gov/secureaccess](#) to review the required identity authentication process.

The IRS urges taxpayers to take advantage of the many tools and other resources available on IRS.gov.

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The IRS continues to work with state tax agencies and the private-sector tax industry to address tax-related identity theft and refund fraud. As part of the [Security Summit](#) effort, stronger protections for taxpayers and the nation's tax system are in effect for the 2019 tax filing season.

The new measures attack tax-related identity theft from multiple sides. Many changes will be invisible to taxpayers but will help the IRS, states and the tax industry provide additional protections, and tighter security requirements will better protect tax software accounts and personal information.

Renew ITIN to avoid refund delays

Many Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers (ITINs) expired on Dec. 31, 2018. This includes any ITIN not used on a tax return at least once in the past three years. Also, any ITIN with middle digits of 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 81 and 82 (Example: 9NN-73-NNNN) is now expired. ITINs that have middle digits 70, 71, 72 or 80 expired Dec. 31, 2017, but taxpayers can still renew them. Affected taxpayers should act soon to avoid refund delays and possible loss of eligibility for some key tax benefits until the ITIN is renewed. An ITIN is used by anyone who has tax-filing or payment obligations under U.S. tax law but is not eligible for a Social Security number.

It can take up to 11 weeks to process a complete and accurate ITIN renewal application. For that reason, the IRS urges anyone with an expired ITIN needing to file a tax return this tax season to submit their ITIN renewal application soon.

Sign and validate electronically filed tax returns

All taxpayers should keep a copy of their tax return. Some taxpayers using a tax filing software product for the first time may need their adjusted gross income (AGI) amount from their prior-year tax return to verify their identity.

Taxpayers using the same tax software they used last year will not need to enter their prior year information to electronically sign their 2017 tax return. Taxpayers can learn more about how to verify their identity and electronically sign tax returns at [Validating Your Electronically Filed Tax Return](#).

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