COVID-19 and Immigrants in New York City

New York City is home to 3.1 million immigrants who make up about 37% of the City’s population and 44% of its workforce. Here are some tips for immigrant communities in New York, the City of Immigrants.

Public Charge

Tip: Do not cancel your benefits without making sure they affect your immigration case!

Getting care, treatment, or testing for COVID-19 will NOT make you a “public charge” or hurt your ability to apply for a green card. Getting discounted medical care will not hurt your ability to apply for a green card. There is no “public charge” test when green card holders apply for citizenship.

If you have questions about immigration and public benefits, call the free, confidential ActionNYC hotline at (800) 354-0365, Monday to Friday from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., or call 311 and say “Public Charge” to access timely and trusted information and connections to legal help.

USCIS

All USCIS field offices have resumed non-emergency, face-to-face services to the public. Application support centers (ASC) have not re-opened as of June 30, 2020. On June 17th, USCIS resumed in-person naturalization oath ceremonies with social distancing guidelines. Interviews and biometrics appointments will resume gradually. The USCIS New York asylum office began a phased reopening on June 15th and is conducting in-person interviews. The Newark asylum office remains closed.

Tip: If you have an application pending at USCIS, keep an eye on ASC openings!

Appointments: USCIS will automatically reschedule any necessary ASC appointments that were cancelled due to the temporary office closure or send notifications of biometrics reuse to eligible individuals. However, not every ASC is open. To see if your ASC is open, go to https://www.uscis.gov/about-us/uscis-office-closings. If you scheduled an InfoPass or other appointment and the USCIS office it is scheduled at is closed, you should reschedule a new appointment on your own as soon as possible by calling (800)-375-5283.

Visa Extensions: USCIS continues to accept and process B1/B2 (’tourist’) applications and petitions. However, COVID-19 has caused changes in travel plans that prevent tourist visa holders from leaving the U.S. on time. Because of this, USCIS can excuse a delay in extension/change of status request, if the delay was due to extraordinary circumstances.
ICE
Tip: No one should avoid seeking testing or treatment for COVID-19 over immigration concerns!

ICE cancelled all in-person check-ins for people who are not detained. Telephonic check-ins are still happening. Arrests by ICE continue. ICE has said it will implement some limitations on who it will arrest and that it will not carry out arrests at or near healthcare facilities, except in extraordinary circumstances.

Immigration Court
Tip: If you have a Master Calendar hearing, and you do not have a lawyer, show up anyway!

Immigration Courts in New York City are open for filings and detained hearings only. Most ‘non-detained’ hearings between March 16 - July 24 have been cancelled. If your hearing is cancelled, they will reschedule it later. All Master Calendar hearings for individuals with attorneys will be conducted via telephone until further notice. Individuals not represented should go in person. (Note: if you do not show up to your hearing, the judge may order you deported (also called “removed”) without your presence).


Healthcare

NYC Health + Hospitals provides care to all New Yorkers, regardless of immigration status or insurance. NYC Health + Hospitals will help you, even if you do not have insurance and cannot pay for healthcare. This is true for all types of healthcare services, including emergency care, doctor visits, medications, long-term care, and hospital stays. Call NYC Health + Hospitals at (844) 692-4692 or dial 311.

NYC Care is a healthcare access program that guarantees low-cost and no-cost services offered by NYC Health + Hospitals to New Yorkers who do not qualify for or cannot afford health insurance. Visit NYCCare.nyc or call 646-NYC-Care (646-692-2273) or 311. NYC Care is accepting new enrollments and currently available in the Bronx, Staten Island, and Brooklyn.

PRUCOL (Permanently Residing Under Color of Law) stands for a person who has no status, has lived in the U.S. for more than a year, has an order of supervision, no immigration status, and has no order of deportation. PRUCOL individuals who meet financial eligibility can get Medicaid, Child Health Plus, or Essential Plan in New York State. PRUCOL is not an official immigration status, but many immigrants are described this way, in terms of applying for benefits in New York City and New York State.

Housing and Rent

Currently, no tenant may be evicted until further notice, and all pending eviction orders are suspended by court order. Tenants who are eligible for unemployment insurance or
benefits or face financial hardship due to COVID-19 may not be evicted for nonpayment of rent until at least August 20, 2020. Tenants who live in public housing, have a Section 8 rental voucher, or live in a building that has federally backed mortgages or funding may not be evicted for nonpayment of rent until at least July 24, 2020. If a City Marshal attempts to evict you, you can call the NYC Department of Investigation at (212) 825-5953 to report a violation of the Governor’s Executive Order.

**New York City COVID-19 Immigrant Relief Program**

On April 16, the Mayor’s Office for Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) and the Open Society Foundation announced the creation of a $20 million fund for undocumented New York City residents, after Congress passed a $2.2 trillion stimulus bill that excluded undocumented immigrants. The program aimed to distribute the money to 20,000 people, with one-time payments of $400 going to individuals and as much as $1,000 per family, according to the initial announcement. Disbursements are being made through 30 community organizations, but there is no complete list of organizations distributing funds.