

Does Your Child Have a Legal Father?

Paternity Information



How do I establish paternity?

When a child is born and the parents are not married, the child does not have a legal father until paternity is established. The most simple way to do this is for both parents to sign an **Affidavit Acknowledging Paternity** at the hospital when the baby is born. When both parents sign the Affidavit, the man becomes the legal father of the child and his name is placed on the child's birth certificate.

What if we do not sign the affidavit at the hospital?

If you do not complete the Affidavit at the hospital, it is not too late. You can contact the Department of Health and Senior Services' Bureau of Vital Records or the Family Support Division for help completing the Affidavit any time after your child's birth, regardless of the child's age.

Why should we establish paternity?

Once paternity is legally established, the father's name will be on the birth certificate. Having the father's name on the birth certificate will help:

- The child enroll in the father's health insurance plan
- The child gain rights to social security or Veterans benefits if the father dies or becomes disabled
- Establish custody, visitation, and a child support order (if needed)

What if we are not sure who the child's father is?

You can ask for a paternity test before signing the Affidavit. Either the mother or the man who believes he might be the child's father can apply for paternity testing through the Family Support Division. It is important to note that a father's name is not added to a birth certificate based on the results of the paternity test. The parents will still need to complete an Affidavit or update the child's birth record through the courts.

If a man believes he may be the father of a child, he may consider registering with the Putative Father Registry. This allows a man to officially claim he is, or believes he might be, a child's father. This should be done before paternity is legally established if the father cannot find the child's mother, or if a child's mother does not want to establish paternity for the child.

Will a parent have to pay child support?

Not necessarily. When both parents voluntarily sign the Affidavit Acknowledging Paternity, there is no order for child support or medical coverage. If a parent would like to request child support, they can contact a private attorney or the Family Support Division. The parent who does not live with the child is usually required to provide financial and medical support. State guidelines are used to set the amount of support based on the incomes of both parents.



What if we disagree on establishing paternity?

Either parent may speak to a private attorney or ask the Family Support Division for help. If both parents do not agree to a paternity test, the Family Support Division can also help get a court order to complete one any time before the child's 18th birthday.

Anyone without a legal father can also get help establishing paternity for themselves between the ages of 18 and 21.

Does establishing paternity give a father rights to custody and visitation?

Yes, establishing paternity gives a father legal rights to their child. The father and mother may agree on custody and visitation without court involvement. If they do not agree, a court must settle the matter.

About the Putative Father Registry

The Putative Father Registry records the names and addresses of fathers (or men who believe they might be fathers) of children born outside of marriage.

The Putative Father Registry helps protect a father's rights to a child they believe is theirs if they are worried their child may be placed for adoption. If a father's name is on the registry, the court will have to get consent before proceeding with an adoption. If a father is concerned their child may be placed for adoption, they must place their name on the Putative Father Registry before the child's birth, or within 15 days of the child's birth, in order to be notified of an adoption proceeding for the child.

To add a name to the Putative Father Registry a man must file a Notice of Intent with the Bureau of Vital Records. To request a copy of the Notice of Intent to Claim Paternity, call **573-751-6837** or visit: health.mo.gov/data/vitalrecords/putative.php.

Contact Us

To get a copy of the Affidavit Acknowledging Paternity for completion, contact:

Bureau of Vital Records
PO Box 570
Jefferson City, MO 65102-0570

For more information about paternity, child support or paternity tests, contact:

Family Support Division
PO Box 6790
Jefferson City, MO 65102-6790
855-454-8037
dss.mo.gov/child-support
Relay Missouri: 711

Missouri Department of Social Services, Family Support Division is an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer/program. All services provided on a non-discriminatory basis. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities.