

# California Firearm Law Cheat Sheet

*(Updated summary — not legal advice. Always verify with official sources.)*



## Overview

California has some of the strictest firearm regulations in the United States. Laws govern nearly every aspect of purchase, possession, transfer, storage, transport, and use. This guide summarizes the major points for quick reference.

## Buying and Transferring Firearms

- All firearm purchases from dealers must go through the **Dealer Record of Sale (DROS)** process.
- A **background check** and a **10-day waiting period** are mandatory.
- Private party transfers must also go through a licensed dealer unless specifically exempt.
- Multiple purchase limits exist: generally, **no more than one handgun or semiautomatic centerfire rifle in a 30-day period** (check current DOJ updates).
- Firearms must be purchased from **licensed California dealers** — importing or bringing firearms into the state without proper procedure is illegal.

## Background Checks and Waiting Period

- California requires a background check for all firearm sales and transfers.
- DOJ runs these checks through the DROS system and can delay or deny transfers based on criminal records, restraining orders, or mental health prohibitions.
- A **minimum 10-day waiting period** applies to all purchases, even if the buyer passes the background check early.

## Prohibited Persons

You **cannot own or possess firearms** in California if you are:

- Convicted of any felony.
- Convicted of certain violent misdemeanors or domestic violence offenses.
- Subject to a restraining order or protective order.
- Adjudicated as mentally incompetent or addicted to narcotics.
- Under 21 (except certain law enforcement or military exemptions).

Possession while prohibited is a **criminal offense** with severe penalties.

# Carrying Firearms

## Open Carry

- Open carry of loaded firearms is generally **prohibited statewide**, with limited exceptions in unincorporated rural areas or while hunting or shooting lawfully.

## Concealed Carry (CCW)

- Requires a **permit** issued by a county sheriff or city police chief.
- The applicant must complete training and background checks and demonstrate good moral character.
- Issuance standards vary by county; many have updated policies following court decisions affecting “good cause” requirements.
- Concealed carry is **prohibited** in sensitive places such as schools, government buildings, or anywhere posted against firearms.

# Assault Weapons

- California bans specific firearm models and “assault weapons” defined by **features** such as pistol grips, folding stocks, flash suppressors, or detachable magazines.
- Registration of previously owned assault weapons was only allowed during specific periods; unregistered possession is **illegal**.
- Manufacturing, importing, or selling assault weapons or .50 BMG rifles is a **felony**.
- Modifying a firearm to add or remove features that evade classification can still be considered unlawful.

# Magazine Capacity

- Possession, sale, or importation of magazines capable of holding **more than 10 rounds** is illegal.
- Litigation has created temporary changes in enforcement, but as of now, **large-capacity magazines remain prohibited** pending final appellate rulings.
- Always verify the latest DOJ or court status before relying on any “grandfathering” or exceptions.

# Ammunition Purchases

- Ammunition sales are subject to background checks and must be processed through a licensed vendor.
- Direct mail-order ammunition shipments to consumers are **prohibited**.

- Some recent court cases have temporarily changed enforcement; confirm current status through the California DOJ Bureau of Firearms before purchasing.

## Safe Storage

- Firearms must be stored securely to prevent access by children or prohibited persons.
- Dealers must provide or confirm ownership of a **DOJ-approved firearm safety device** with every sale.
- Failing to secure a firearm that a child or prohibited person accesses can result in criminal liability.

## Gun Violence Restraining Orders (GVRO)

- Family members, employers, co-workers, school employees, or law enforcement can petition a court for a GVRO if someone poses a threat.
- A GVRO temporarily removes firearms and ammunition from the individual and prohibits future possession for the duration of the order.
- Violation of a GVRO is a **criminal offense**.

## Transporting Firearms

- Firearms must be **unloaded** and **locked** in a container during transport.
- The glovebox or center console **does not count** as a legal locked container.
- Long guns (rifles and shotguns) must also be unloaded, and if they are assault weapons or handguns, they must be locked during transport.
- Only travel directly between authorized locations such as home, range, or gunsmith.

## Penalties

Violations can result in:

- **Misdemeanor or felony charges**
- **Fines, imprisonment, and loss of firearm rights**
- **Permanent record disqualifications** for future purchases or possession
- **Forfeiture** of firearms involved in the offense

## Do Not Do This

- Do not purchase or transfer firearms without using a licensed dealer.
- Do not modify firearms to avoid compliance.
- Do not assume ammunition or magazine laws have changed without checking DOJ updates.
- Do not carry a firearm in public without a valid permit.
- Do not lend firearms without confirming the borrower is legally eligible.

## Official Resources

- **California Department of Justice, Bureau of Firearms:**  
<https://oag.ca.gov/firearms>
- **Penal Code Sections:** Title 4, Part 6 of the California Penal Code

## Disclaimer

This document is for educational use only. It summarizes major California firearm laws but does not constitute legal advice. Laws and regulations change frequently due to new legislation and court rulings. Always verify with the California Department of Justice or a qualified attorney before making any legal decisions involving firearms.