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What Happens After a Big Jackpot is Hit in California

Frequently Asked Questions Answered Here

SACRAMENTO – Following the recent sale of a *Powerball*® ticket now worth \$1.08 billion, the California Lottery wants everyone to know what to expect after a large jackpot is hit in the Golden State.

The Claim Process

First and foremost, the California Lottery will NOT know who the winner is until someone completes and turns in a claim form, which also requires producing the winning ticket. That can be done in person at any one of California Lottery's [nine offices with customer service counters](#). Players can also send in their claim and winning ticket via mail; certified mail is strongly recommended. Claim forms and detailed instructions can be found on the California Lottery's website [here](#). The California Lottery has no way of contacting jackpot winners proactively; the player must realize they've won and come forward. For *Powerball* and *MegaMillions*®, jackpot winners have one year from the date of the draw to submit a claim.

Then What?

The California Lottery typically does NOT publicly confirm or acknowledge when a prize claim has been received because there's no way to be certain any given claim is legitimate. To verify a legitimate win, all California Lottery claims for large prizes go through a thorough vetting process. Part of that process involves a California Lottery law enforcement officer interviewing the claimant before that person is declared a winner. The interview involves questions about the point of sale for the winning ticket. There are aspects of the ticket not disclosed to the public to help protect the integrity of the win.

These standard security procedures can take weeks or months to complete; California Lottery processes more than 10,000 prize claims a month at its headquarters in Sacramento. Unusual circumstances include missing information in the prize claim packet, failure of the claimant to produce the unaltered winning ticket, and/or unclear answers to the security questions – just to cite a few. There are myriad circumstances that may arise, elongating the process for a prize claim. Players who want to check on the status of their prize claim can call the California Lottery's customer service contact center at 1-800-LOTTERY.

Once the verification process is complete, the prize claim is transferred from California Lottery to the California State Controller's Office which issues the check for the net prize amount. For net prizes of \$100 million or more, the winner is encouraged to elect to receive their lump sum payment via a wire transfer; they must provide account information pertaining to a domestic bank to qualify. California

does not tax Lottery winnings; however, for large prize payments, a portion of the winnings are withheld on behalf of the IRS.

When It Becomes Public

Names of all California Lottery winners are, by law, public record in California and subject to the State's Public Records Act. The California Lottery gets frequent requests from the news media for names of big winners. Those names are not made public until the verification process of a prize claim is fully complete. Once a jackpot winner's claim has been fully processed, it's typical for the California Lottery's communications and media team to make a public announcement either via [a news release](#) or [news conference](#). News media are also encouraged to follow [@calotterypress](#) on social media, where all big announcements are posted, including breaking news on big jackpot nights. Questions for the Lottery's media team can be directed to the contact information listed above.

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The California Lottery's mission is to provide supplemental funding to California public schools, including kindergarten and grades 1-12, community colleges, the California State University, the University of California, and other California public educational entities. The funds the Lottery transferred to public education totaled approximately \$2 billion for fiscal year 2021-22, which amounted to a modest percentage of education's overall budget. However, this funding is largely discretionary, meaning schools can use this for important, yet unfunded instructional programs they would otherwise not afford. During the same period, the Lottery generated more than \$8.8 billion in sales, more than 95% of which went back to the community in the form of prize payments, retailer commissions and bonuses, and contributions to education. If you feel you have a gambling problem or know someone who does, you can get free confidential help by calling the California Problem Gambling Helpline at 1-800-GAMBLER.

www.calottery.com