



Identity Theft Frequently Asked Questions

What is identity theft?

Identity theft is a criminal offense that is used to refer to all types of misconduct in which someone wrongfully obtains and uses another's personal data in some way that involves fraud or deception, typically for economic gain.

How significant is the problem and what are the costs?

Identity theft is currently the fastest growing crime in America. The Federal Trade Commission estimates that 27 million Americans were victims of some kind of identity theft in the past five years. Unfortunately the problem does not end here. Victims spend between 30 and 60 hours of their time repairing their good name and approximately \$1,000 of their money clearing up the problem after they have been victimized.

How can identity thieves get my information?

Unfortunately, identity thieves can steal your information through a variety of sources:

- They may remove mail from your trash—such as a pre-approved credit card applications.
- You may receive an email or pop-up message that resembles a bank or credit card company asking you to “verify” your personal information and send it back to them.
- If you don't shred your sensitive financial information, they may remove your credit card statements, bank statements, driver's license information, tax information, stock or 401K information from your trash. Once you put your trash out on the street, it becomes public information.
- Thieves working in restaurants and bars may swipe your credit card information using a special storage device when processing your card.

What are warning signs of identity theft?

To avoid identity theft you should always be aware of the following:

- Withdrawals from your bank account that you cannot explain.
- You do not get your bills or other mail.
- Merchants refuse your checks.
- Debt collectors call you about debts that are not yours.
- You find unfamiliar accounts or charges on your credit report.
- Medical providers bill you for services you didn't use.
- The IRS notifies you that more than one tax return was filed in your name, or that you have income from an employer you don't work for.
- You get a notice that your information was compromised by a data breach at a company where you have done business or have an account.

What can I do to prevent identity theft?

While identity theft is not completely avoidable, there are many steps you can take to help lower your chances of falling victim, such as:

- Never post your full name, Social Security number, address, phone number or account numbers on publicly accessible sites.
- When using an ATM, make sure no one has the ability to see you enter your PIN.
- Adopt an attitude of healthy skepticism toward websites that offer prizes or giveaways.
- Shred receipts, credit offers, credit applications, insurance forms, checks, bank statements, expired debit/ATM cards, etc.
- If you do not have a secure mailbox, request a vacation hold on mail if you will be traveling.
- Do not give out personal information over the phone, through the mail or over the internet unless you've initiated the contact or know who you're dealing with.
- Before you dispose of any electronic device, get rid of all the personal information it stores.
- Do not open files, click on links or download programs sent by strangers.
- Always read privacy policies.
- Check your credit report yearly. You can do so at www.annualcreditreport.com You can get a free credit report from each of the three credit bureaus once a year, meaning you can check your credit report for free up to three times a year.

What do I need to do if my identity is compromised?

It is important to take action immediately after you realize your identity has been compromised. If you have CBC's Security Plus Checking account, please call 805.988.2151 to file a claim so that a recovery advocate can be appointed to you immediately. If you do not have a Security Plus Checking account, you should:

- Call the company where you know fraud occurred.
- Place a fraud alert on your credit reports and get copies of your report.
- Report identity theft to the Federal Trade Commission.
- File a report with your local police department.

[Click here](#) for more information from the Federal Trade Commission.

What does credit monitoring do for me?

Credit monitoring is an incredibly valuable service that will assist you in a multitude of ways. Credit monitoring is able to alert you of changes in your credit report and score, will help you keep track of your information and where it appears online as well as alert you to indications of fraud. In addition to helping you catch suspicious activity, credit monitoring is also a great tool to help you better manage your overall financial health. While credit monitoring tools should never be used as a substitute for taking necessary precautions, it can be an invaluable tool in enhancing your overall efforts to care for your credit health.

You may purchase CBC-certified credit monitoring packages here:

<https://cbcfedcu.merchantsinfo.com/services.aspx>.

What is a security freeze?

A security freeze blocks any potential creditors from being able to view your credit file, unless you affirmatively unfreeze your file beforehand. With a freeze in place on your credit file it is close to impossible to establish a new line of credit because the creditors cannot gauge how risky it is to loan to you without access to your credit file.

What is involved in freezing my credit file?

Freezing your credit involves notifying each major credit bureau that you wish to place a freeze on your credit file. Once you establish the freeze, each credit bureau will provide you with a unique Personal Identification Number (PIN). This PIN can be used to unfreeze your account in the future if you wish to do so. There are four consumer credit bureaus including Equifax, Experian, Innovis and Trans Union.

What is involved in unfreezing my file?

The easiest way to unfreeze your credit in order to gain a new line of credit is to contact the company from which you hope to gain the credit. They can tell you which credit bureau they rely upon for credit checks. At this point in time, you can call that bureau to remove the freeze with the PIN they originally provided you. The thawing process will typically take no longer than 24 hours.

Sources:

1. <http://idt911.com/KnowledgeCenter/IdentityTheftFAQ.aspx#monitoring>
2. <http://www.creditsesame.com/blog/top-identity-theft-questions-answered/>
3. <http://www.mass.gov/eopss/crime-prev-personal-sfty/identity-theft/avoid-becoming-a-victim.html>