

Identity Theft

Identity theft is a serious crime and it occurs when someone steals your personal identifying information to commit fraud or other crimes. It can cost you time and money, and can destroy your credit and good name. Personal identifying information includes any sensitive financial or personal information such as your Social Security Number, birth date, address, driver's license number, bank account number, and credit card number.

There are different types of identity theft that can occur depending on the personal information stolen, and how the information is used. Your personal information can be obtained in many different ways. You should learn how this information can be unintentionally obtained, take steps to protect your personal information, and prevent yourself from being a victim of such a crime. Some of the common ways that your personal information can be unintentionally obtained include:

- Theft by family or friends
- Retrieved from the trash
- Stolen mail
- Lost or stolen wallet
- Purchased from a corrupt insider at a bank, hotel, car rental agency, etc.
- Unauthorized access of personal information stored on a computer
- Phishing scam (A scam where an individual pretends to be a reputable organization and requests personal information via the telephone or email)

Identity theft in resident care facilities or other medical extended stay facilities is on the rise. Theft can occur by employees of the facility, or others entering the facility posing as employees. You can reduce the chances of becoming an identity theft victim by following these tips:

- Be alert to visitors or unidentified individuals in the facility, and report any concerns.
- Do not leave checkbooks, credit cards, ATM cards, mail, or other items unsecured.
- Keep all non-medical personal information such as Social Security Number, birth date, and driver's license number in a secure place.

Medical Identity Theft

Theft of medical information and health records is another common form of identity theft. A thief may use your health insurance numbers and name to obtain prescriptions drugs, file claims, or obtain medical care. This can cause inaccuracies in your medical treatment records, insurance information, and possibly your credit report. You can protect yourself from medical identity theft in the following ways:

- Shred labels on prescription bottles before you throw them out.
- Do not share your health plan information with anyone who offers free health services or products.
- Shred insurance forms, physician statements, and similar documents.
- Read your medical and insurance statements, such as Explanation of Benefits (EOB) statement or Medicare summary, regularly and completely to ensure the information is accurate regarding treatment you received.

Tax Identity Theft

Another type of identity theft is tax identity theft and it generally takes place during the tax filing season. The theft occurs when someone uses your name, Social Security Number or other identification to create a fraudulent return that generates a big refund.

These fraudulent returns are typically filed at the beginning of tax season before a legitimate taxpayer files. The thief takes advantage of generous tax breaks — whether the real taxpayer qualifies for that particular tax break or not. Some refund fraud has involved misuse of credits, such as a first-time homebuyer credit, a telephone excise tax, and education credits in past years.

Victims of this crime usually don't discover the fraud until it's too late. The first clue some people get is when they try to electronically file their taxes but their return is rejected by the system. Another clue of this theft is when they receive a letter from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) stating that they owe taxes for a year they did not file.

If you discover that you are a victim of tax identity theft, you should contact the IRS identity theft toll-free line at 800-908-4490 immediately.

Protecting your personal information is important to avoid being a victim of identity theft. See the next section [*Consumer Tips on Identity Theft Prevention*](#) to learn how you can protect yourself.