



# How to handle identity theft

Here's what you can do if you suspect you're the victim of identity theft or fraud.

## ORDER YOUR CREDIT REPORTS FROM ALL THREE NATIONWIDE CREDIT REPORTING COMPANIES

Each company's credit report about you is slightly different, so order a report from each company. When you order, you must answer some questions to prove your identity. Read your reports carefully to see if the information is correct. If you see mistakes or signs of fraud, contact the credit reporting company to take further action.

See Module 7: Understanding Credit Reports and Scores for tools that can help you order, review, and correct mistakes on your credit reports.

## REPORT IDENTITY THEFT

Report identity theft to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) at [identitytheft.gov](http://identitytheft.gov) or (877) 438-4338 or by mail to:

**FTC Consumer Response Center  
600 Pennsylvania Ave, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20580**

You'll answer some questions about what happened and they'll use your information to:

- Create a personal recovery plan
- Pre-fill letters to send to merchants, banks, and others affected by the identity theft
- Complete an "Identity Theft Report," which is your official statement about the crime

In most cases, you can use your Identity Theft Report in place of a police report to clear your account and credit history of transactions that resulted from the identity theft.

Contact the police to report identity theft if:

- You know who did it or have information that could help a police investigation
- An identity thief used your name in a traffic stop or any encounter with police
- You're asked to produce a police report

## CONSIDER A CREDIT PROTECTION TOOL

There are three types of credit protection tools that you can request from credit reporting companies: a security freeze, an initial fraud alert, or an extended fraud alert. These are all free.

## SECURITY FREEZE

A freeze on your credit report generally helps prevent new credit accounts from being opened in your name. Usually, third-party-access to your credit file is completely blocked from new users without your express authorization.

A freeze helps prevent identity thieves from opening fraudulent accounts in your name. This also means you won't be able to apply for credit as easily if you were planning to open a new account or apply for a loan.

You must contact each of the credit reporting companies to freeze your credit report. You will have to contact them to lift the freeze before a third-party can access your credit report.

## INITIAL FRAUD ALERT

An initial fraud alert requires creditors to verify your identity before opening a new account, issuing an additional card, or increasing the credit limit on an existing account. This is a good first step if you're worried that your identity may be stolen, like after a data breach. The alert lasts for one year and can be renewed after it expires.

## EXTENDED FRAUD ALERT

An extended fraud alert requires creditors to contact you before approving credit and lasts for seven years. It also requires credit reporting companies to remove you from lists prepared for pre-screen offers of credit or insurance for five years. This is available if you've filed an identity theft report with one of the three nationwide credit reporting companies.

CREDIT PROTECTION AND REQUIREMENTS	SECURITY FREEZE	INITIAL ALERT	EXTENDED ALERT
Lender is required to verify your identity before approving new credit		✓	✓
Completely prevents your report from being shared with most third parties unless lifted	✓		
Triggers heightened verification procedures for the people who use your credit report		✓	✓
Request if you believe you're a victim of ID theft	✓	✓	
Requires an identity theft report			✓
Extra free credit report		✓	✓
Exclusion from prescreening lists			✓
Free in every state	✓	✓	✓

## CONTACT INFO FOR THE THREE NATIONWIDE CREDIT REPORTING COMPANIES

### Equifax Security Freeze

P.O. Box 105788  
Atlanta, Georgia 30348  
(800) 685-1111  
<https://www.equifax.com/personal/credit-report-services/credit-freeze/>

### Experian Security Freeze

P.O. Box 9554  
Allen, TX 75013  
(888) 397-3742  
<https://www.experian.com/freeze/center.html>

### Transunion

P.O. Box 2000  
Chester, PA 19016  
(800) 680-7289  
<https://www.transunion.com/credit-freeze/place-credit-freeze>