

How to Avoid or Recover from Identity Theft

A guide from MHAS' Consumer Finance Project

What is Identity Theft?

- “The fraudulent acquisition and use of a person’s private identifying information, usually for financial gain.” -Oxford
- When someone uses your information without your permission to their own financial advantage, which you usually end up paying for.

Are there different types?

There are many types and methods of ID theft, and they range on a spectrum of seriousness.

- Debit or credit card fraud
- Driver’s license theft/fraud
- Tax ID theft
- Online shopping fraud
- Mortgage or home title fraud
- Medical ID theft
- Mail fraud

*Your response will be different depending on the type of ID theft, so it’s important to find more information and/or talk to an attorney.

Identity theft warning signs

- ID theft victims usually find out about the theft through a fraud alert, data breach alert, or other outright notification of suspicious activity.
- 90% of people have their ID stolen by a complete stranger.
- 60% of people don’t know how the thief accessed their information.

How to confirm identity theft in your case

- Review a free copy of your credit report at <https://www.annualcreditreport.com/index.action>
- Follow up on suspicious financial activity—don’t ignore it! For example, if you receive credit card statements for an account you did not open, call the company and follow up.
- Visit the websites of the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and Consumer Finance Protection Board (CFPB) for details on how to identify ID theft in your own life.

Actions to take to prevent identity theft

- Regularly review your credit reports
- Secure your mail, shred sensitive documents, log out of public computers, and confirm who you're dealing with before disclosing your information.
- If you suspect ID theft, put a "Fraud Alert" on your account—you can place this on your own, without the help of an attorney.

Steps to take if your identity has been stolen

- Visit IdentityTheft.gov to report ID theft and learn about next steps for your own particular situation
- Consider placing a "Credit Freeze" on your accounts. You do not need an attorney to do this for you.
- For information on both Credit Freeze and Fraud Alert options, visit www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/what-know-about-credit-freezes-and-fraud-alerts

Disclaimer: This handout is for educational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice. If you have a legal question, please contact MHAS or another attorney of your choice.