

Equifax Breach-143 Million Were Affected and What You Need To Know

As you may already know, Equifax, one of the three major consumer credit reporting agencies, revealed that hackers had gained access to company data that potentially compromised sensitive information for 143 million American consumers, including Social Security numbers and driver's license numbers.

The three main credit bureaus, Equifax, TransUnion and Experian, maintain reports on when consumers attempt to obtain a credit card, car or even a mortgage loan, their payment history and the amount of available credit. Some companies use one or all three of these companies when consumers seek a credit card, mortgage or other loans. Since personal information was stolen, along with 209,000 credit card numbers, the breach will increase the opportunity for identity theft to occur. As a Corner Stone Credit Union member, we wanted to provide you with tips you can use to protect your identity, personal information or even credit score. Consumers need to be pro-active in the aftermath of being hacked and to help you with this, please follow these 5 tips.

1: Enroll in Equifax's program

Equifax has set up its own program to help people find out if they were one of the millions affected in the hack.

Step 1: Head to the enrollment page (link on home page of our website). Enter your last name and last six digits of your social security number and head to the next page.

Step 2: If you received an enrollment date, write it down. Equifax does not ask for your email address, so it won't remind you of your enrollment date.

Step 3: On (or after) your enrollment date, you'll need to continue the enrollment process. **You have to complete the enrollment process by November 21, 2017.**

1. Equifax will provide you with an enrollment date for credit monitoring.
2. Equifax will let you know you were not impacted.

2: Check your credit reports

If you're not sure if your data was affected, consider looking through your credit reports for any suspicious activity. The US government guarantees everyone a free annual credit report from the three major bureaus -- yes, including Experian.

When looking through your reports, keep an eye out for new accounts you didn't open, late payments on debts you don't recognize and any other activity that looks unfamiliar. If you suspect someone used your identity to open credit cards, take on loans, or re-open closed accounts, contact the credit card company's fraud department immediately.

You are not responsible for charges made on a fraudulent card, but you have to report the issue in a timely manner.

3: Freeze your credit

Even if your credit report comes back clean, remain vigilant about protecting your credit. One of the most reliable ways to prevent someone from opening credit cards in your name is to place what's called a "credit freeze."

To freeze your credit, contact each of the credit bureaus using these phone numbers:

- Equifax: 1-800-349-9960
- Experian: 1-888-397-3742
- TransUnion: 1-888-909-8872

The process is usually automated and can be completed within a few minutes. Just be sure to write down your PINs in a secure place.

4: Set a fraud alert

A fraud alert is another way to make it hard for identity thieves to open accounts in your name. When a fraud alert is set, credit card companies will be required to verify your identity before opening an account. That, combined with the credit freeze, is a great way to keep your credit secure.

To set a fraud alert, contact just one of the credit card bureaus and ask for an initial fraud alert. Once the alert is set, it will last 90 days. After that, you'll have to renew it. Here are the appropriate phone numbers for the bureaus (remember, just call one):

- Equifax: 1-888-766-0008
- Experian: 1-888-397-3742
- TransUnion: 1-800-680-7289

5: Repeat the process for your loved ones

Because Equifax is not notifying those affected through direct mail or email, some people will be left without the resources or tech--savvy to protect their identities or find out if they were compromised. With that in mind, consider helping your loved ones -- especially the elderly without computer access -- with the above steps.

Last but not least, watch out for tax season

It's still too early to know if and how the data exposed in Equifax's breach will be misused, but one major concern comes around during tax season. Identity thieves can use stolen social security numbers to file fraudulent tax returns and receive refunds.