

Protect Yourself Online

Thanks to the Internet, you can conduct business, catch up with friends, purchase products from every corner in the world and reserve travel plans all from the comfort of your home. The flipside is that the Internet, and the anonymity it affords, can also give online scammers and identity thieves access to your computer, personal information, finances and more.



Tips for online safety

- **Protect your personal information** (name, social security number, account numbers, etc.). To minimize your risk of identity theft, don't share this information unless you know how it will be used and protected. Don't reply, or click on, emails asking for this information.
- **Know who you're dealing with.** When shopping online, look for the dealer's physical address and telephone number. Call to make sure the number works. Before you download free software, make sure you read the small print to avoid spyware.
- **Understand any offers you take.** Read the fine print and ask the company for more information about products or services if needed. A legitimate company will be willing to provide this, a scammer won't. Make sure you know the total costs, delivery date and any cancellation or return policies. Print out the information so you have documentation.
- **Use anti-virus and anti-spyware software, and a firewall. Update them all regularly.** Look for anti-virus software that removes or quarantines viruses and anti-spyware that can undo changes the software makes to your system. Make sure your firewall is set up properly and turned on.
- **Be sure to set up your operating system and web browser software properly.** Select security settings high enough to reduce your risk of being hacked and make sure to regularly update your system with the latest patches.
- **Protect your passwords.** Keep your passwords in a secure place, and don't share them on the Internet, over email or on the phone. The longer the password, the better.
- **Back up important files.** If you have important files stored on your computer, copy them to a removable disc and store it in a safe place.
- **Don't download programs from web sites you're not familiar with.** Suspicious sites may contain viruses in their downloaded programs.

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