



# TAX IDENTITY THEFT AWARENESS WEEK

## Most Common Form of Identity Theft: Tax Identity Theft

Tax Identity Theft Awareness Week is an annual reminder to safeguard your information when preparing taxes. Tax identity theft happens when someone files a phony tax return using your personal information — like your Social Security number — to get a tax refund from the IRS. It also can happen when someone uses your Social Security number to get a job or claims your child as a dependent on a tax return. Tax identity theft has been the most common form of identity theft reported to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) for the past five years.

Tax identity thieves get your personal information in a number of ways. Including:

- Going through trash or stealing mail from your home or car
- Sending phony emails that look like they're from the IRS and asking for personal information
- Making calls that look like they're from the IRS and asking for personal information over the phone

Tax identity thieves may get your personal information through their employment. For instance:

- Employees at hospitals, nursing homes, banks, and other businesses have access to steal your information
- Phony or dishonest tax preparers can misuse their clients' information or pass it along to identity thieves

So what can you do about it? To lessen the chance you'll be a victim:

- File your tax return early in the tax season before identity thieves have the ability to
- Use a secure internet connection if you file electronically. Don't use unsecure, publicly available Wi-Fi hotspots at places like coffee shops or a hotel lobby
- Mail your tax return directly from the post office
- Shred copies of your tax return, drafts, or calculation sheets you no longer need

- Respond to all mail from the IRS as soon as possible
- Know the IRS won't contact you by email, text, or social media. If the IRS needs information, it will first contact you by mail
- Don't give out your Social Security number (SSN) or Medicare number unless necessary. Ask why it's needed, how it's going to be used, and how it will be stored
- Get recommendations and research a tax preparer thoroughly before you hand over personal information
- If your SSN has been compromised, contact the IRS ID Theft Protection Specialized Unit at 800-908-4490
- Check your credit report at least once a year for free at [annualcreditreport.com](https://annualcreditreport.com) to make sure no other accounts have been opened in your name

What if you are a victim? Tax identity theft victims typically find out about the crime when they get a letter from the IRS saying that more than one tax return was filed in their name, or IRS records show they received wages from an employer they don't know. If you get a letter like this, don't panic. Contact the IRS Identity Protection Specialized Unit at 800-908-4490.

More information about tax identity theft is available from the FTC at [ftc.gov/taxidtheft](https://ftc.gov/taxidtheft) and the IRS at [irs.gov/identitytheft](https://irs.gov/identitytheft).

Unfortunately, tax identity theft isn't the only way scammers are targeting taxpayers. Thousands of complaints have been made about IRS imposters who claim people owe unpaid taxes and will be arrested if they don't pay up. They may know all or part of your Social Security number, and rig caller ID to make it look like it's really the IRS calling. Before you can investigate, you're told to put the money on a prepaid debit card and tell them the number — something no government agency would ask you to do.

If you owe — or think you owe — federal taxes, call the IRS at 800-829-1040 or go to [irs.gov](https://irs.gov). IRS workers can help you with your payment questions. The [IRS doesn't ask people to pay with prepaid debit cards or wire transfers](#), and doesn't ask for credit card numbers over the phone. When the IRS contacts people about unpaid taxes, they usually do it by postal mail, not by phone. Report IRS imposter scams to the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA) [online](#) or at 800-366-4484, and to the FTC at [ftc.gov/complaint](https://ftc.gov/complaint).

If you believe you have been a victim of fraud or would like to report suspicious activity, please [file a report with the Colorado Attorney General's Office here](#).