



EQUIFAX DATA BREACH FACTS AND INFORMATION

As widely [reported](#), the credit reporting bureau Equifax was recently hacked. If you have a credit report, you're likely one of the 143 million Americans whose data may have been exposed, according to the [Federal Trade Commission](#).

A monitor displays Equifax Inc. signage on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) in New York, U.S., on Friday, Sept. 8, 2017. The dollar fell to the weakest in more than two years, while stocks were mixed as natural disasters damped expectations for another U.S. rate increase this year. Photographer: Michael Nagle/Bloomberg

[According to Equifax](#), the breach lasted more than a month, from mid-May until July of this year. The hackers gained access to people's names, Social Security numbers, birth dates, addresses, and even some driver's license numbers. They also got credit card numbers for 209,000 people and dispute documents with personal information for 182,000 consumers.

Unfortunately, at least some of your information was likely involved in this breach if you had a credit file with Equifax. I can tell you that my data was compromised. Let's walk through what you need to do to first determine whether your information was compromised. Then we'll look at what you can do about it.

The first step is to visit www.equifaxsecurity2017.com to find out if your information was exposed. The site includes a Potential Impact tab, where you can enter your last name and the last six digits of your social security number. (Be sure you're on a secure computer and internet connection when you're doing this!) This will tell you whether or not your information was compromised.

Enroll in free credit monitoring even if the site doesn't say you were affected. You'll be able to find out when you can enroll at the site linked above. You'll have from that date until November 21, 2017 to enroll for a free year of credit monitoring.

Here I should add that one year of free credit monitoring is totally inadequate. The Equifax data theft can have life-long consequences for consumers. When a credit card number is stolen, you simply get a new card with a new number. You can't, however, get a new date of birth or Social Security number.

Next, check your credit reports now so that you have a baseline. You can get your free annual credit reports from www.annualcredreport.com. You can also get your reports along with your credit scores directly from [FICO](#).

If you have a [credit report](#), there's a good chance that you're one of the 143 million American consumers whose sensitive personal information was exposed in a data breach at Equifax, one of the nation's three major credit reporting agencies.

Here are the facts, according to Equifax. The breach lasted from mid-May through July. The hackers accessed people's names, Social Security numbers, birth dates, addresses and, in some instances, driver's license numbers. They also stole credit card numbers for about 209,000 people and dispute documents with personal identifying information for about 182,000 people. And they grabbed personal information of people in the UK and Canada too.

There are steps to take to help protect your information from being misused. Visit Equifax's website, www.equifaxsecurity2017.com.

- Find out if your information was exposed. Click on the "Potential Impact" tab and enter your last name and the last six digits of your Social Security number. Your Social Security number is sensitive information, so make sure you're on a [secure computer](#) and an [encrypted network connection](#) any time you enter it. The site will tell you if you've been affected by this breach.
- Whether or not your information was exposed, U.S. consumers can get a year of free credit monitoring and other services. The site will give you a date when you can come back to enroll. Write down the date and come back to the site and click "Enroll" on that date. You have until November 21, 2017 to enroll.
- You also can access [frequently asked questions](#) at the site.

Here are some other steps to take to help protect yourself after a data breach:

- **Check your credit reports** from Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion — for free — by visiting annualcreditreport.com. Accounts or activity that you don't recognize could indicate identity theft. Visit IdentityTheft.gov to find out what to do.
- **Consider placing a credit freeze on your files.** A credit freeze makes it harder for someone to open a new account in your name. Keep in mind that a credit freeze won't prevent a thief from making charges to your existing accounts.
- **Monitor your existing credit card and bank accounts closely** for charges you don't recognize.
- If you decide against a credit freeze, **consider placing a fraud alert on your files.** A fraud alert warns creditors that you may be an identity theft victim and that they should verify that anyone seeking credit in your name really is you.
- **File your taxes early** — as soon as you have the tax information you need, before a scammer can. Tax identity theft happens when someone uses your Social Security number to get a tax refund or a job. Respond right away to letters from the IRS.

Visit Identitytheft.gov/databreach to learn more about protecting yourself after a data breach.

Equifax Data Breach: Five Things to Do After Your Information Has Been Stolen

If you have concerns about the Equifax data breach, please contact Equifax at 866-447-7559

What You Can Do Now

Not everyone will be a victim of identity theft as a result of a breach, but keeping informed can help you mitigate risk when dealing with any data breach. When a breach does occur, you can take action by doing a few things.

1. **Stay alert:** If you have been part of a data breach, the breached company may send you a notice. Retain all documents and consider any suggestions they may have. Also, pay attention to and retain any mail you

receive that is unfamiliar to you, such as notices from the IRS regarding your taxes or any bills from unknown lenders.

2. Initiate a fraud alert: You can set a [fraud alert](https://www.experian.com/fraud/center.html) (https://www.experian.com/fraud/center.html) with Experian. When you request a fraud alert be added with any of the three major credit bureaus, the bureau you contacted will notify the other two and alerts will be added with those bureaus as well. A fraud alert or initial security alert will warn lenders that you may have been a fraud victim. This extra precaution will notify the potential lender that they should contact you before granting any new line of credit in your name. This fraud alert will stay on your credit report for 90 days. You can renew the fraud alert when it expires.

3. Monitor your financial accounts: Visit your online bank and financial accounts, and set up any alert features they may have, if you have not already done so. This could help save some time and keep you notified of any unusual events when they occur.

4. Monitor your credit reports: You can check your credit report for free once every twelve months by visiting [AnnualCreditReport.com](http://annualcreditreport.com) (http://annualcreditreport.com). Checking your credit report can help you identify any unusual activity, such as new accounts, new personal information or inquiries. Experian free credit report members can check their [Experian credit report for free](https://www.experian.com/consumer-products/free-credit-report.html) (https://www.experian.com/consumer-products/free-credit-report.html) every 30 days on sign in.

5. Freeze or lock your credit file: You may consider adding a security freeze. You can also freeze your credit reports with [Equifax](https://www.freeze.equifax.com) (https://www.freeze.equifax.com) and [TransUnion](http://freeze.transunion.com) (http://freeze.transunion.com). A [security freeze](https://www.experian.com/freeze/center.html) (https://www.experian.com/freeze/center.html) will prevent potential lenders from accessing your credit report. Your credit report will only be accessible by unfreezing the account. If you are planning on applying for new credit in the near future, you could consider postponing the security freeze. Fees and requirements for adding and removing a freeze vary by [state](https://www.experian.com/blogs/ask-experian/credit-education/preventing-fraud/securityfreeze/) (https://www.experian.com/blogs/ask-experian/credit-education/preventing-fraud/securityfreeze/). Also, if you are already a member [of Experian IdentityWorks](https://www.experian.com/consumer-products/creditlock.html), you can lock and unlock (https://www.experian.com/consumer-products/creditlock.html) your Experian credit report at any time.

WHAT IS A CREDIT HISTORY?

Sometimes, people talk about your credit. What they mean is your credit **history**. Your credit history describes how you use money:

- How many credit cards do you have?
- How many loans do you have?
- Do you pay your bills on time?

If you have a credit card or a loan from a bank, you have a credit history. Companies collect information about your loans and credit cards.

Companies also collect information about how you pay your bills. They put this information in one place: your credit report.

WHAT IS A CREDIT REPORT?

Your credit report is a summary of your credit history. It lists:

- your name, address, and Social Security number
- your credit cards
- your loans
- how much money you owe

- if you pay your bills on time or late

WHY DO I HAVE A CREDIT REPORT?

Businesses want to know about you before they lend you money. Would you want to lend money to someone who pays bills on time? Or to someone who always pays late?

Businesses look at your credit report to learn about you. They decide if they want to lend you money, or give you a credit card. Sometimes, employers look at your credit report when you apply for a job. Cell phone companies and insurance companies look at your credit report, too.

WHO MAKES MY CREDIT REPORT?

A company called a credit reporting company collects your information. There are three big credit reporting companies:

- TransUnion
- Equifax
- Experian
- These companies write and keep a report about you.

CAN I SEE MY CREDIT REPORT?

You can get a free copy of your credit report every year. That means one copy from each of the three companies that writes your reports.

The law says you can get your free credit reports if you:

- call Annual Credit Report at 1-877-322-8228 or
- go to AnnualCreditReport.com
- Someone might say you can get a free report at another website. They probably are not telling the truth.

WHAT IS A CREDIT SCORE?

A credit score is a number. It is based on your credit history. But it does not come with your free credit report unless you pay for it.

A high credit score means you have good credit. A low credit score means you have bad credit. Different companies have different scores. Low scores are around 300. High scores are around 700-850.

DO I NEED TO GET MY CREDIT SCORE?

It is very important to know what is in your credit report. But a credit score is a number that matches your credit history. If you know your history is good, your score will be good. You can get your credit report for free.

It costs money to find out your credit score. Sometimes a company might say the score is free. But if you look closely, you might find that you signed up for a service that checks your credit for you. Those services charge you every month.

Before you pay any money, ask yourself if you need to see your credit score. It might be interesting. But is it worth paying money for?

WHAT IF I DO NOT HAVE CREDIT?

You might not have a credit history if:

- You have not had credit card
- You have not gotten a loan from a bank or credit union
- Without a credit history, it can be harder to get a job, an apartment, or even a credit card. It sounds crazy: You need credit to get credit.

HOW DO I GET CREDIT?

Do you want to build your credit history? You will need to pay bills that are included in a credit report.

- Sometimes, utility companies put information into a credit report. Do you have utility bills in your name? That can help build credit.
- Many credit cards put information into credit reports.
- Sometimes, you can get a store credit card that can help build credit.
- A secured credit card also can help you build your credit.

WHY IS MY CREDIT REPORT IMPORTANT?

Businesses look at your credit report when you apply for:

- Loans from a bank
- Credit cards
- Jobs
- Insurance

If you apply for one of these, the business wants to know if you pay your bills. The business also wants to know if you owe money to someone else. The business uses the information in your credit report to decide whether to give you a loan, a credit card, a job, or insurance.

WHAT DOES “GOOD CREDIT” MEAN?

Some people have good credit. Some people have bad credit. Some people do not have a credit history. Businesses see this in your credit report. Different things happen based on your credit history:

I have **GOOD** credit



- I pay my bills on time
- I do not have big loans

That means:

- I have more loan choices.
- It is easier to get credit cards.
- I pay lower interest rates.
- I pay less for loans and credit cards.
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I have **BAD** credit



- I pay my bills late
- I owe a lot of money

That means:

- I have fewer loan choices.
- It is harder to get credit cards.
- I pay higher interest rates.
- I pay more for loans and credit cards.

I have **NO** credit



- I never borrowed money from a bank or credit union
- I never had a credit card

That means:

- I have no bank loan choices.
- It is very hard to get credit cards.
- I pay high interest rates.
- Loans and credit cards are hard to get and cost a lot.

All this information is in your credit report.

WHY SHOULD I GET MY CREDIT REPORT?

An important reason to get your credit report is to find problems or mistakes and fix them:

- You might find somebody's information in your report by mistake.
- You might find information about you from a long time ago.
- You might find accounts that are not yours. That might mean someone stole your identity.

You want to know what is in your report. The information in your report will help decide whether you get a loan, a credit card, a job or insurance.

If the information is wrong, you can try to fix it. If the information is right – but not so good – you can try to improve your credit history.

WHERE DO I GET MY FREE CREDIT REPORT?

You can get your free credit report from Annual Credit Report. That is the only free place to get your report. You can get it online: [AnnualCreditReport.com](https://www.annualcreditreport.com), or by phone: 1-877-322-8228.

You get one free report from each credit reporting company every year. That means you get three reports each year.

WHAT SHOULD I DO WHEN I GET MY CREDIT REPORT?

Your credit report has a lot of information. Check to see if the information is correct. Is it **your** name and address? Do you recognize the accounts listed?

If there is wrong information in your report, try to fix it. You can write to the credit reporting company. Ask them to change the information that is wrong. You might need to send proof that the information is wrong – for example, a copy of a bill that shows the correct information. The credit reporting company must check it out and write back to you.

HOW DO I IMPROVE MY CREDIT?

Look at your free credit report. The report will tell you how to improve your credit history. Only you can improve your credit. No one else can fix information in your credit report that is not good, but is correct.

It takes time to improve your credit history. Here are some ways to help rebuild your credit.

- Pay your bills by the date they are due. This is the most important thing you can do.
- Lower the amount you owe, especially on your credit cards. Owing a lot of money hurts your credit history.
- Do not get new credit cards if you do not need them. A lot of new credit hurts your credit history.
- Do not close older credit cards. Having credit for a longer time helps your rating.

After six to nine months of this, check your credit report again. You can use one of your free reports from Annual Credit Report.

HOW DOES A CREDIT SCORE WORK?

Your credit score is a number related to your credit history. If your credit score is high, your credit is good. If your credit score is low, your credit is bad.

There are different credit scores. Each credit reporting company creates a credit score. Other companies create scores, too. The range is different, but it usually goes from about 300 (low) to 850 (high).

It costs money to look at your credit score. Sometimes a company might say the score is free. But usually there is a cost.

WHAT GOES INTO A CREDIT SCORE?

Each company has its own way to calculate your credit score. They look at:

- How many loans and credit cards you have
- How much money you owe
- How long you have had credit
- How much new credit you have

They look at the information in your credit report and give it a number. That is your credit score.

It is very important to know what is in your credit report. If your report is good, your score will be good. You can decide if it is worth paying money to see what number someone gives your credit history.

Your credit history is important. It tells businesses how you pay your bills. Those businesses then decide if they want to give you a credit card, a job, an apartment, a loan, or insurance.

Find out what is in your report. Be sure the information is correct. Fix anything that is not correct.

HOW DO I CHECK MY CREDIT REPORT?

This is easy to do by phone:

- Call Annual Credit Report at 1-877-322-8228.
- Answer questions from a recorded system. You have to give your address, Social Security number, and birth date.
- Choose to only show the last four numbers of your Social Security number. It is safer than showing your full Social Security number on your report.
- Choose which credit reporting company you want a report from. (You get one free report from each company every year.)
- That company mails your report to you. It should arrive 2-3 weeks after you call.

WHAT DO I DO WITH MY CREDIT REPORT?

Read it carefully. Make sure the information is correct:

- **Personal information** – are the name and address correct?
- **Accounts** – do you recognize them?
 - Is the information correct?
- **Negative information** – do you recognize the accounts in this section of the report?
 - Is the information correct?
- **Inquiries** – do you recognize the places you applied for credit?
(If you do not, maybe someone stole your identity.)
- The report will tell you how to improve your credit history. Only you can improve your credit history. It will take time. But if any of the information in your report is wrong, you can ask to have it fixed.

HOW DO I FIX MISTAKES IN MY CREDIT REPORT?

- Write a letter. Tell the credit reporting company that you have questions about information in your report.
- Explain which information is wrong and why you think so.
- Say that you want the information corrected or removed from your report.
- Send a copy of your credit report with the wrong information circled.
- Send copies of other papers that help you explain your opinion.
- Send this information Certified Mail. Ask the post office for a return receipt. The receipt is proof that the credit reporting company got your letter.
- The credit reporting company must look into your complaint and answer you in writing.

