# Catch Me if You Can

**Image:** Included in toolkit.

**Suggested Alt Text:** People running from phishing attempts leading to identity theft.

You might experience ID theft and may not become aware until you: receive bills for items you didn’t buy, are contacted by debt collections for accounts you didn’t open, are denied for loan applications, or cannot file your taxes as planned.

## Consequences of Identity Theft

According to the FTC, there were approximately 1.4 million identify theft cases in 2020, more than double those in 2019. Once identity thieves have your personal information, they can drain your bank account, run up charges on your credit cards, open new utility accounts, get medical treatment on your health insurance, file a tax refund in your name and get your refund or file for unemployment. Children are one of the most vulnerable groups and at highest risk because the theft might go unnoticed for years – until a student loan is denied due to bad credit.

## Preventing Identity Theft

Understanding the risks Identity Theft poses helps you recognize ways you may be vulnerable. These are some tips to better protect yourself:

* **Order free credit reports** each year from each of the three nationwide consumer credit reporting companies – Equifax, Experian and TransUnion – to [**determine if there are any errors**](https://consumer.ftc.gov/articles/disputing-errors-your-credit-reports).
* **Enable multi-factor authentication** when available and only utilize [**complex passwords**](https://consumer.ftc.gov/articles/password-checklist)**.**
* **Use security software** on all your devices and [**setup automatic updates.**](https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/blog/2019/06/update-your-software-now)
* [**Place a hold on your mail**](https://reg.usps.com/entreg/LoginAction_input?app=HOLDMAIL&appURL=https%3A%2F%2Fholdmail.usps.com%2Fholdmail) when you are away from home, and shred receipts, credit offers, account statements, and expired credit cards.
* **Create a 6-digit**[**Identity Protection PIN**](https://www.irs.gov/identity-theft-fraud-scams/get-an-identity-protection-pin) with the IRS to provide another layer of security.
* **Monitor electronic transactions** for fraudulent activity.

## Reporting ID Theft

If you suspect you have experienced identity theft, here are some of the actions you should take.

* **FTC ID theft reports** can be used to permanently block fraudulent information from appearing on credit reports, prevent debt from going to collections and place extended fraud alerts on credit reports.
* [**Place a fraud alert or freeze**](https://www.usa.gov/credit-reports#item-214215) on your credit report if anyone has tried to get unauthorized credit accounts with your personal information.
* **Contact the fraud department** at your bank, credit card issuers and any other places where you have accounts.
* **Inform Retailers and Other Companies** where the identity thief opened credit accounts or applied for jobs.
* [**State Attorney General Offices**](https://www.usa.gov/state-attorney-general) offer tips, checklists or can serve as an advocate to help you recover from identity theft.