



PRESS RELEASE

CONSUMER ALERT: Data Breaches: What's the Difference Between Credit Monitoring and Credit Freezing?

BALTIMORE, MD (October 2, 2017) – The Equifax breach has affected 143 million Americans, and at least half of Maryland's population, if not more. Many consumers are wondering what they should do to protect from further damage in light of this massive data breach. While Equifax is offering a free credit monitoring service to consumers affected, many are wondering if that will help. Check out our guide on what the biggest differences are between credit monitoring and credit freezing, and what steps you should take to protect your identity.

What is credit monitoring?

Generally, credit monitoring services alert you of any changes in your credit report. This can be a useful service for quickly detecting unauthorized activity, which is often a sign of identity theft. Many credit monitoring services also offer some form of identity theft insurance or victim assistance. One thing to keep in mind: credit monitoring services can still allow access to your credit files by both legitimate creditors and fraudulent imposters.

Will credit monitoring keep me safe from identity theft?

It could. Monitoring your credit reports can alert you to an identity thief attempting to open new accounts, such as credit cards, in your name. Often you are alerted before the account is actually opened.

If I sign up for credit monitoring, am I still at risk?

Credit monitoring may not protect you from many common forms of identity theft. Monitoring your credit reports will not protect your existing financial accounts from fraud. You may also still be vulnerable for other common forms of fraud, such as [tax-related identity theft](#).

What should I keep in mind if I sign up for credit monitoring?

Treat credit monitoring services with the same importance that you'd treat other financial or insurance products: read the fine print, ask questions, and shop around.

I found out that my information was compromised, what's the best strategy to protect myself?

A credit freeze – at all three credit reporting agencies – is the best way to prevent identity thieves from opening new accounts in your name. A credit freeze blocks access to your credit files and is extremely effective in preventing fraudulent accounts from being created. In Maryland, placing a credit freeze will be free after October 1, 2017.

How long does a credit freeze last?

Credit freezes last until you remove them.

What else do I need to know about credit freezes?

You will receive a PIN code to unfreeze your credit report. It's important to keep track of the PIN codes for when you need to lift or remove your credit freeze.

Consumers should be aware that there are fees to temporarily “thaw” or lift the freeze for a credit report if the consumer needs to apply for credit, rent an apartment, or engage in another transaction in which the credit report needs to be reviewed. The fee for temporarily thawing a credit report is \$5 for each credit bureau, but creditors generally only need to review one bureau's report.

Consumers who are actively seeking credit to buy a new home or car may want to wait before placing a freeze on their credit reports.

Both credit freezes and temporary thaws are free for victims of identity theft who have a police report.

Should I sign up for the free credit monitoring? Or, should I freeze my credit?

Yes – as long as you understand the risks and limitations of credit monitoring. Pairing credit freezes with free monitoring can be a good strategy to both prevent and check for identity theft.

The Office of Attorney General recommends consumers take the following steps:

- Check your credit reports from all three of the major credit reporting agencies: Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion. Reports can be obtained for FREE by visiting www.annualcreditreport.com. Unrecognizable accounts or activity could indicate identity theft.
- Place 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 credit freezes must be obtained from each of the credit reporting agencies. Effective October 1, 2017, credit freezes are free of charge from each credit agency for Marylanders. A credit freeze won't prevent a thief from making charges to your existing accounts, such as debit and credit cards. Parents or guardians of minor children may also place a credit freeze on behalf of their child. For more information on how to obtain a credit freeze, please visit <http://www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/Pages/IdentityTheft/freezing.aspx>
- Monitor your existing credit card and bank accounts closely for changes you do not recognize.
- Visit www.identitytheft.gov/databreach to learn more.

Download our [Identity Theft Guide](#) for more information on credit monitoring and credit freezing, and other tips to protect your identity.