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shopping online to steal identities and money – as well as sensitive tax and financial data that can be used to file fraudulent tax returns when the filing season opens in ...

Dec. 02, 2019



The Internal Revenue Service and the Security Summit partners opened this year's National Tax Security Awareness Week with a warning for holiday shoppers on Cyber Monday to secure their computers and mobile phones to reduce the threat of identity theft.

During the holiday season, criminals take advantage of large numbers of people shopping online to steal identities and money – as well as sensitive tax and financial data that can be used to file fraudulent tax returns when the filing season opens in early 2020.

“The holidays may mean the shopping season to consumers, but it’s the hunting

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The week continues through Dec. 6 with a series of special educational efforts taking place at more than 25 partner events across the country to raise awareness about protecting taxpayers and tax professionals from identity theft. The week includes special social media efforts on platforms including Twitter and Instagram, including a special Twitter chat on @IRSnews and #TaxSecurity on Thursday.

“While you’re preparing for the holidays, thieves are preparing for the tax season, gathering up names, addresses, Social Security numbers and other bits of data that they can use to try filing a fraudulent tax return” Rettig said. “Everyone should take a few basic steps to help protect their identities, their financial accounts, their computers and their mobile phones.”

When shopping online, the IRS and Summit partners remind taxpayers to protect themselves with these tips:

1. Shop at sites where the web address begins with “https” – the “s” is for secure communications over the computer network. This is an added layer of protection when sharing credit card numbers for a purchase. Keep in mind that scam sites also can use “https,” so people should ensure they are shopping at a legitimate retailer’s website.
2. Don’t shop on unsecured public wi-fi in places like a mall. Remember, thieves can eavesdrop.
3. At home, secure home wi-fis with a password. As homes become more connected to the web, secured systems become more important, from wireless printers, wireless door locks to wireless thermometers. These can be access points for identity thieves.
4. Don’t forget to use security software for computers and mobile phones – and keep it updated. Make sure purchased anti-virus software has a feature to stop malware, and there is a firewall that can prevent intrusions.

5. Protect personal information; don't hand it out to just anyone. Phishing scams –

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can be used to copy information from computers or phones – providing an important place to recover financial or tax data.

In addition, the Summit partners note these security measures include mobile phones – an area that people sometimes can overlook. Thieves have become more adept at compromising mobile phones. Phone users also are more prone to open a scam email from their phone than from their computer.

Taxpayers can check out security recommendations for their specific mobile phone by reviewing the Federal Communications Commission's [Smartphone Security Checker](#). Since phones are used for shopping and even for doing taxes, remember to make sure phones and tablets are just as secure as computers.

The IRS, state tax agencies, the private sector tax industry, including tax professionals, work in partnership as the Security Summit to help protect taxpayers from identity theft and refund fraud.

This is the first in a week-long series of tips to raise awareness about identity theft. See [IRS.gov/SecuritySummit](#) for more details.

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