

The Equifax data breach has been making headlines since it was first announced on September 7, and with good reason. The breach may have exposed personal information—including social security numbers, driver's license numbers, and addresses—of 143 million Americans, making it one of the largest and most serious cybersecurity breaches in history. Read on for answers to some commonly asked consumer questions.

How do I find out if I'm affected?

Statistically speaking, you've probably been affected. The current population of the U.S. is 323 million, so the Equifax breach impacts nearly half of all Americans. Equifax has set up a special website for consumers to check if their information may have been compromised in the cyberattack. However, this requires the consumer to submit personal information to the website, which some are hesitant to do. If you're debating whether you should check with Equifax to see if your information was part of the breach, ask yourself if you will act differently depending on what you find out. If the answer is 'yes,' then visit <https://www.equifaxsecurity2017.com> and scroll down to click "Potential Impact" to begin the process.

How does Equifax have my information if I never gave it to them?

Equifax is one of three major credit bureaus in the U.S. (there are other smaller companies with similar services). Their role is to provide lenders—such as banks, credit card companies, and other creditors—with the information they need to make loan decisions. When you apply for a new credit card, for example, the credit card company checks with a credit bureau to see if you have a history of late or missed payments in order to determine if they should grant your application and send you the new card. To facilitate this process, many businesses report relevant information to one or more of the bureaus as part of their day-to-day operations.

What should I do to protect myself?

There are several options for consumers to protect themselves in the wake of the Equifax data breach. The most common concern is that criminals will use the stolen information to obtain credit under a victim's identity. The most drastic way a consumer can help prevent this is to request a credit freeze with each of the credit bureaus. However, this option makes it more difficult (and costly) to obtain additional, legitimate credit in the future. The best way to protect yourself is to monitor your accounts closely and frequently. The Equifax data breach has been making headlines since it was first announced on September 7, and with good reason. The breach may have exposed personal information—including social security numbers, driver's license numbers, and addresses—of 143 million Americans, making it one of the largest and most serious cybersecurity breaches in history. Read on for answers to some commonly asked consumer questions.

Where can I get help to figure all of this out?

One of the best resources to turn to for help navigating this situation is your local bank. As a trusted, secure resource for financial advice, your bank will be able to guide you on the best course of action for your specific circumstances. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out.

