Data Protection During a Pandemic

4 Tips for Protecting Your Data

In these challenging times, the last thing you want to worry about is having your data stolen or breached. Here are a few tips to help you protect your sensitive data.

1. Don’t Overshare

After you get the much-anticipated COVID-19 vaccine it may be tempting to post a pic of the coveted vaccine card to celebrate the historic moment. What you may not realize though is that you may be sharing a lot of personal detail with just that one picture.

Your vaccine card can contain sensitive and personal information, such as your name, address, health care provider, and more. Also, by posting your vaccine card online, you may be voiding the privacy protections under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA).

**Pro Tip:** If you decide to post a picture to celebrate this monumental moment, be sure not to include any personal details like your patient ID or address in the picture.

2. Update Your Passwords

Now more than ever it is important to ensure that you have strong passwords for all your online accounts. As more of our daily life lives online these days, using weak or even the same password across multiple sites means that it may be easier to access those accounts and the sensitive information (i.e., payment details) attached to online profiles.

**Pro Tip:** Be sure to use complex, lengthy passwords for all your most sensitive accounts (i.e., bank account, email) and consider using a password manager to store your login details so you don’t forget all of those 20-character passwords!

3. Limit Who Has Access

In an increasingly digital world, most Americans (81 percent) believe that they have little to no control over their collected data. By limiting who has access to your data, however, you can control your own level of risk of data breach. The fewer companies and organizations that have your data, the more in control you will be over your online presence.

**Pro Tip:** As a first step, go through your inbox and unsubscribe from all the emails you don’t want to receive anymore and as a second step, request for your account to be deleted if you no longer access that site.

4. Stay Alert

Unfortunately, there are no shortcuts to COVID-19 vaccination. If someone calls to offer you a vaccine for a small fee, do not give them any personal information as they are most likely a scammer. To stay up to date, regularly checking resources like the Federal Trade Commission, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, and the Centers for Disease Control will arm you with the knowledge you need to identify fraudsters before they can take your information by understanding the key indicators of a scam as well as the latest trends used by criminals.

**Pro Tip:** If ever an offer seems too good to be true, it probably is. Don’t click on suspicious links or reply to unknown senders.

For more information, contact VA Privacy Service
Privacy Hotline: 202-273-5070 | privacyservice@va.gov