

Christmas a danger time for identity theft

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Out shopping, or away from home on holiday, Australians should be especially vigilant in the holiday season to prevent identity theft. One in five Australians have been victims of identity theft, a survey has found. Christmas and New Year is a period of peak activity for fraudsters and identity thieves, survey sponsor Veda Advantage, an ID theft protection company, says. "Everyday things like online shopping, more frequent use of credit cards and ATMs and leaving mail to pile up in our letterbox when we are away can increase our exposure to identity theft," company spokesman Kelvin Kirk says. "When we're relaxing on holiday we are often less conscious of when and where we hand over valuable identity information - leaving us vulnerable to fraud," he said. Twenty per cent of respondents in the survey of 1,100 people aged over 16 reported that someone had either stolen their identity, illegally accessed or tried to access their bank accounts, stolen or skimmed credit cards or tried to steal their PIN. Criminals were working hard to cash in on holiday spirit complacency, Mr Kirk said, and Australians needed to be aware of this and protect themselves. Mr Kirk's tips to avoid being ripped off include arranging for friends or relatives to collect mail while on holiday, taking care with online credit card purchases, regularly changing online passwords, and keeping wallets and purses safe at shopping centres. He says criminals most commonly find personal details by stealing mail, rummaging through garbage or rifling through lost or stolen wallets and cheque books.