

Reports of online shopping fraud have surged by 30% over the pandemic as many of us continue to shop online in light of current restrictions.

Figures from Action Fraud show that criminals conned **17,407** shoppers out of almost **£13.5 million** over the Christmas period last year, an increase of over 20% when compared to the same period in 2018.

Action Fraud is warning the public to take extra care when shopping online, ahead of Black Friday and Cyber Monday, as shoppers search for bargains and gifts for loved ones in the run up to Christmas.

Top tips to shop online securely this festive season:

Where to shop:

Making a purchase from an online store you haven't used before? Carry out some research first, or ask a friend or family member if they've used the site and about their experiences before completing the purchase.

Your information:

Only create an account if necessary or to save you effort if you're going to use that site a lot in the future. Be cautious if the website asks you for details that are not required for your purchase, such as your mother's maiden name or the name of your primary school.

Payments:

If you decide to go ahead with the purchase, ensure that the webpage where you enter your payment details is secure (website address starts with "https"). Using a credit card to pay online also means that should the worst happen and your payment details are compromised, your main bank account won't be directly affected

Phishing:

Some of the messages you receive about amazing offers may contain links to fake websites. Not all links are bad, but if you're unsure, don't use the link – go separately to the website. Report any suspicious emails you receive by forwarding them to: report@phishing.gov.uk You can also report suspicious text messages by forwarding them to **7726**.

For more information about how to shop online securely, please visit:

actionfraud.police.uk/shoponlinesafely