

Police advice to help avoid becoming the victim of theft or fraud on Black Friday

Black Friday may look a little different across our communities this year and Police Scotland have issued advice to the public to help avoid becoming the victim of theft or fraud.

If you live in an area where you're able to go out shopping for Christmas gifts tomorrow, remember to adhere to the physical distancing restrictions in place and follow our safety tips.



Keep cash out of view – Don't leave new purchases on display in your car -Park in busy, well-lit areas

And if you're doing your shopping online make sure websites are authentic by carefully checking the address is spelled correctly. Ideally, type it in rather than clicking on a link in an email, text or post. It's easy for scammers to set up fake websites that are very similar to the real thing.

When you're paying, make sure the page is secure by checking that addresses begin with 'https' ('s' is for secure) and there's a closed padlock in the address bar. An additional word of warning: this means that the page is secure, but the site could still be operated by fraudsters.

Many advertisements for items such as gifts, holidays and events on social media and online forums are genuine, but be aware that others are fraudulent. Be extra vigilant about checking that such ads are authentic.

However desperate you are to buy that late gift or an item that's in short supply, don't pay for anything by transferring money directly to people or companies you don't know. If it's a fraud, it's doubtful the bank will be able to recover or refund your money. If you can, pay by credit card. The same goes for holidays, travel and tickets.

Log out of the web page or app when payment is completed. Simply closing it may not log you out automatically.

Fake or counterfeit goods are of inferior quality, contravene copyright law and affect the livelihoods of workers who make the real thing. They can also be dangerous to users. Don't buy them intentionally – however cheap or 'authentic' they – and do all you can to make sure what you're buying is authentic.

Avoid 'free' or 'low-cost' trials – whether for the latest handset or slimming pills – without thoroughly reading the small print and trusted reviews. You could be signing up for large monthly direct debits which are very hard to cancel.

If a winter holiday or short break is on the cards, check that what you're booking online is genuine by doing thorough research. Look for independent reviews, and make sure travel agents / tour operators are genuine by checking for an ABTA/ATOL number. Pay by credit card for extra protection.

Christmas is a favourite time for scammers to send fraudulent

emails, texts or DMs, or post fraudulent offers on social media. At this time of year, with the increase in internet shopping, fake parcel firm delivery notifications are commonplace attachments or links, as are emails and other messages featuring 'special offers' and 'prizes'. Don't click on links in emails, texts or posts that you're not expecting, and don't open unexpected email attachments.