

Internet Safety

Introduction

Using the internet is part of many people's daily lives. Many people care about their privacy online, but may not realize who has access to their information. This resource explores safer ways to use the internet, how to manage sensitive information, and encourages readers to be intentional about what information they share and with whom. If you have specific concerns about your online safety, you may want to talk to an advocate about your situation. You can contact the Virginia Statewide Hotline 24/7 by phone at 1-800-838-8238, by text at 804-793-9999, or by chat at vadata.org/chat.

On the Internet: Private browsing and clearing history

There are several benefits to using private windows in your internet browser. Most private browsers do not store your browsing history. This means that others should not be able to see sites you visit or searches you make. Note that this would not offer browsing privacy if your device is being monitored in other ways (e.g. via spyware, video recording, etc.). This section will cover how to open a private window and delete entries from your history in different internet browsers. With all browsing windows, make sure to exit out of them on both desktops and mobile devices when you are finished.

Google Chrome

To open a private or "Incognito" window, use these keyboard shortcuts on a computer:

- For Windows, Linux, or Chrome OS computers, press "Ctrl", "Shift" and "N" at the same time.
- For Mac OS, press "⌘" (command/cmd), "Shift", and "N" at the same time.

To open an "Incognito" tab on your mobile device, hold down the Chrome icon and select "New Incognito tab".

To clear your desktop browser history, use the keyboard shortcut "Ctrl" and "H". From here you can choose individual entries to delete from your history. Check the box to the left of an entry you want to erase and then click "Delete".

To delete your browsing history on your mobile device, open the Chrome app. Click the Menu, and then select “History”. From here you can tap and hold on individual entries to erase.

[For more help, you can visit Chrome’s support page.](#)

Mozilla Firefox

To open a private window, you can use these keyboard shortcuts on a computer:

- For Windows, Linux, or Chrome OS, press “Ctrl”, “Shift” and “P” at the same time.
- For Mac OS, press “⌘” (command/cmd), “Shift”, and “P” at the same time.

To open a private window on your mobile device, hold down the Firefox icon and select “New private tab”.

To delete individual entries on your desktop, click the Menu. Select “History”, then “Manage History”. From here, you can search for websites you want to remove by name, right click them, and choose “Forget about this site”.

To delete individual entries from your mobile device, open the Firefox app and click the Menu. Select “History”. From here you can tap and hold on individual entries to erase.

[For more help, you can visit Firefox’s support page.](#)

Microsoft Edge

To open a private or “InPrivate” window, you can use these keyboard shortcuts on a computer:

- For Windows, Linux, or Chrome OS computers, press “Ctrl”, “Shift” and “N” at the same time.
- For Mac computers, press “⌘” (command/cmd), “Shift”, and “N” at the same time.

To open a private window on your mobile device, hold down the Edge icon and select “New private tab”.

To clear delete individual entries in Edge from your desktop, use the keyboard shortcut “Ctrl” and “H”. In the History window, you can hover the cursor over

individual entries which will reveal an “x” on the right of each entry. Click the “x” to delete an entry.

To delete individual entries from your mobile device, open the Edge app. Click the Menu and select “History”. From here you can tap and hold on individual entries to erase.

[For more help, you can visit Edge’s support page.](#)

Apple Safari

To open a private window, you can use this keyboard shortcut on a computer:

- For Mac computers, press “⌘” (command/cmd), “Shift”, and “N” at the same time.

To open a private tab on your mobile device, hold down the Safari icon and select “New private tab”.

To clear your browser history from your desktop, use the keyboard shortcut “⌘” (command/cmd) and “Y” to view your full browsing history. From here you can hold down “Ctrl” and select an individual entry in your browser history, then choose “Delete” from the drop-down menu.

To delete individual entries from your mobile device, open the Safari app and click the Bookmark icon. From here, select the History icon. Swipe left on any entries you want to delete.

[For more help, you can visit Safari’s support page.](#)

Your Devices: Who has access?

It is important to know who has access to your phone, computer, and other technology. There are several ways someone may have gained access. You may have shared the login credentials (like your password) with someone. Someone may have accessed your login credentials without your consent. Someone may have installed spyware onto your device. Consider who may have access to your devices before handling sensitive matters.

If you are concerned that someone may be monitoring your devices, you may want to handle sensitive or confidential matters on a different device. There are several options to consider. You can use a computer that is free to the public, like

the ones found in public libraries. You can also ask to use the device of someone you trust, like a friend or family member. You can purchase a separate device that only you know about. If you move sensitive matters to a separate device, you may want to continue using your original device(s) as you normally would. Significant changes in your habits may alert the person monitoring the device that you are aware of being monitored. This could cause the person to become angry or escalate violence.

A Safer Way to Be Online: A secure internet connection

A secure internet connection can help protect you and your data from outside threats. If you are using a connection that is under your control, like a personal router or hotspot, there are steps you can take to keep it more secure. One is to give this connection a strong password and to avoid sharing it widely. It is good to change your password periodically, especially if there are people you do not want to have access to your internet connection. Open networks are connections which have no password or a widely known password. Use discretion when using open networks.

Websites which have “HTTPS” at the beginning of their URLs are considered more secure than those that do not. When using a computer, most browsers will indicate that a site is not secure if it does not use “HTTPS”. If you’re using a phone, make sure to click the site URL and look for “HTTPS” as opposed to “HTTP”. Remember, the “S” stands for “secure”. If you’re able to turn your own phone into a hotspot, that can be a good way to use a more secure network when you’re in public.

Conclusion

The tips in this resource are suggestions for how to use technology in a safer way. The goal is to equip you with the knowledge to make informed decisions about how you use the internet in as safe a way as possible. If you have questions or concerns, you can contact the Virginia Statewide Hotline to connect with an advocate about your situation. Advocates are available 24/7 by phone at 1-800-838-8238, by text at 804-793-9999, or by chat at vadata.org/chat. All services are free and confidential, and language interpretation is available.