

STOP & THINK: STAY SAFE DURING FESTIVE PERIOD

In the run up to Christmas with people out shopping for presents, police are urging people to take precautions to reduce the risk of becoming a victim of opportunist thieves and pickpockets.

Chief Superintendent Jeff Moore said: "It's a lot easier for pick-pockets and shoplifters to conceal themselves amongst the crowds in shopping areas. Often working in pairs, or groups, pickpockets will use various ways to lift your purse or wallet out of your pocket or bag. Sometimes one will distract you by drawing your attention to something, asking for directions or simply bumping into you while another will adeptly help themselves to your money or cards."

Officers work closely with store staff and CCTV operators to take early action against anyone seen acting suspiciously.

"We also see a rise in theft from cars at this time of year with opportunist thieves taking advantage of busy shoppers leaving parcels openly on view and their vehicle insecure.

"If you put items you have just bought in your vehicle before heading back to the shops, put them in your boot, lock your car and make sure no one is watching ready to pounce.

"We urge people to 'Stop and Think'. Be vigilant and take extra precautions to reduce the risk of becoming a victim."

Some top tips include:

- keep purses and wallets safe by keeping them secure in a closed handbag worn across the body or an inside pocket of your clothing
- vehicles with shopping on view are easy pickings for opportunist thieves. If you are taking shopping back to your vehicle before doing more shopping, be aware of who is around you – make sure no one is watching what you are doing. Put shopping out-of-sight in the boot and check your vehicle is locked
- no one thinks twice about using a mobile phone on the go, but it does make us vulnerable to a thief who can quickly snatch it and run. With increased numbers of people in town centres, it's easy for a thief to snatch your phone and disappear into a crowd.

Police would also encourage people to take precautions at home:

- don't leave Christmas presents on view at home as opportunist thieves will see this as an invitation to steal them. Thieves are also wise to people storing bigger presents such as bikes in sheds and garages. Keep thieves out by making sure you have strong locks and keep storage areas locked. Alternatively, find somewhere in your home or a relative's home to store them safely
- on-line shoppers are urged to protect themselves from cybercrime/fraud by ensuring they only make purchase from reputable websites, are careful when entering credit/debit card numbers and are encouraged to open a Pay Pal account – a more secure way of making purchases on the web. It's wise to update virus protection software on devices before you shop
- second-hand goods can seem a bargain but ensure you exercise caution on who you are buying them from.

People can register their phone, mobile data devices and any other items for free on www.immobilise.com for the best chance of getting it back if lost or stolen. You just need your IMEI number which can be found by dialling *#06# and serial numbers for your other items. If police recover lost or stolen property they check the database and can return the item to the rightful owner.

Ch Supt Moore added: "We want everyone to enjoy the festive period and be able to look back on great memories; don't let the memory be one of being a victim of crime."