

Avoiding COVID-19 Scams

Unfortunately, some people—including criminals—often look for opportunities to take advantage of others during times of national crisis. The current coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic creates a perfect environment for lawbreakers who may be targeting vulnerable victims. Very often, their targets may be older adults.

Here are some effective defenses to help stop criminals in their tracks. Arm yourself with these smart strategies to protect yourself and your family against scammers.

First Step

Make sure to fact-check all the COVID-19 information you receive. Don't share any messages about the virus on social media or email—or even in conversation with friends and family—unless you verify the information is from a trusted source.

Look to government agencies such as:

- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** <https://www.cdc.gov/>
- **Food and Drug Administration** <https://www.fda.gov/>
- **Federal Trade Commission** <https://www.ftc.gov/>
- If you're unsure about a news item or piece of information, use a fact-checking website such as **Snopes** <https://www.snopes.com/>

Telephone Fraud

You get a call that seems to be coming from the CDC. It's a plea for a donation to them during this time of crisis. But in reality, this is "government impersonation fraud," say CDC officials. "Federal agencies do not request donations from the general public."

Other phone frauds include fake coronavirus treatments, vaccinations, work-at-home schemes, or opportunities to provide personal protective gear and cleaning products. Some scammers may also call claiming to be friends or relatives who need immediate financial assistance related to COVID-19.

Protect Yourself:

- **Do not take calls from phone numbers you don't recognize.**
- **Never give out your personal information,** banking information, Social Security number, or any other information over the phone or to strangers.
- **Hang up on robocalls. Don't press any numbers.** The recording might say that pressing a number will remove you from their call list or send you to a live operator, but it could lead to even more robocalls.

Email Scams

CDC officials are warning consumers about a widespread campaign of “phishing” emails that claim to be from the CDC and mention a flu pandemic. The email instructs you to open a document that supposedly tells you how to prevent the spread of the disease
<https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2019/s0322-phishing.html>.

■ **If you get an email like this, know that it comes from hackers** trying to gain access to your personal computer files, as well as files on networks you’re connected to. After you open the attachment, you may get a note demanding some type of payment to remove the virus from your computer.

■ **You should also pay careful attention to web links you click or find from search results.** Never trust websites claiming to be from the government if they don’t end in **.gov**. Websites using **.org** or **.edu** are also among the safest to use, since those types of links are used by non-profits or educational institutions like universities. Be the most wary of **.com** websites, since these can be set up by almost anyone.

Protect Yourself:

■ **Never open unsolicited emails or attachments from people you don’t know.**

■ **DO NOT CLICK ON ANY LINKS OR ATTACHMENTS** in the email or visit websites that seem unfamiliar or have strange web addresses.

■ **Never share personal information, especially passwords or account numbers, with anyone via email.**

Beware of Fake COVID-19 Testing

The FDA is actively and aggressively monitoring for any companies that may be selling products for fraudulent coronavirus (COVID-19) testing, prevention, and treatment. As a result of these activities, the agency is beginning to see fake test kits being marketed to test for COVID-19 in the home. See <https://www.fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates/beware-fraudulent-coronavirus-tests-vaccines-and-treatments> for more information.

At this time, the FDA has not authorized any home test for COVID-19.

“Get Your Stimulus Check Early” Scams

If you haven’t received a stimulus check yet, don’t respond to any calls or emails promising an early check. Anyone who tells you they can get your government stimulus check related to COVID-19 early is scamming you, too. See <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/blog/2020/04/coronavirus-stimulus-payment-scams-what-you-need-know> for more information.



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