

Be aware of Coronavirus Scams

COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus, has hit North America. While this is bad news for most Americans, it's great news for scammers who are cashing in on our anxiety about the disease. Look out for fake cures, phony prevention measures, and other coronavirus cons. The coronavirus outbreak has been big business for scammers. First it was [fake masks](#), then [fake government grants](#), and now it's a fake COVID-19 tests. In the past few days, there have been many reports of phony text messages claiming to be from a government agency.

How one Scam Works:

You are worried about coronavirus and hear about preventions or a "cure" on social media, in an email, or a website. The message or website contains a lot of information about this amazing product, including convincing testimonials or a conspiracy theory backstory. For example, one scam email claims that the government has discovered a vaccine but is keeping it secret for "security reasons." You figure it can't hurt to give the medicine a try, so you get out your credit card.

Don't do it! Currently there are no U.S. Food and Drug Administration-approved vaccines or drugs to prevent coronavirus, although [treatments are in development](#). No approved vaccines, drugs, or products specifically for coronavirus can be purchased online or in stores. In fact, the Federal Trade Commission issued [warning letters](#) to several companies claiming they had a product to cure or prevent the virus.

Peddling fake medicines isn't the only way scammers are trying to cash in on coronavirus fears. Con artists are [impersonating the CDC and the World Health Organization in phishing emails](#). These messages claim to have news about the disease and prompt readers to download malicious software. Another scam email tries to con people into [donating to a fake fundraising effort](#), claiming to be a government program to develop a coronavirus vaccine.

How to Spot a Coronavirus Con:

Spot a fraudulent health product by watching out for these red flags:

- **Don't panic. Do your research:** Be skeptical of alarmist and conspiracy theory claims and don't rush into buying anything that seems too good – or crazy – to be true. Always double check information you see online with official news sources.
- **Be wary of personal testimonials and "miracle" product claims.** Be suspicious of products that claim to immediately cure a wide range of diseases. No one product could be effective against a long, varied list of conditions or diseases. Also, testimonials are easy to make up and are not a substitute for scientific evidence.
- **It's "all natural."** Just because it's natural does not mean it's good for you. All natural does not mean the same thing as safe.

- **Check with your doctor:** If you're tempted to buy an unproven product or one with questionable claims, check with your doctor or other health care professional first.

How another Scam Works:

You get a text message that looks like it comes from the US federal government. Current reports say that scammers are impersonating the US Department of Health and Human Services, but they are unlikely to stop there. The message tells you that you must take a “mandatory online COVID-19 test” and has a link to a website. But **there is no online test for coronavirus!**

These are far from the only coronavirus text message scams (often known as “smishing” for SMS phishing). BBB has also gotten reports of texts urging recipients to complete “the census” or fill out an online application in order to receive their stimulus check.

No matter what the message says, don’t click! These texts are phishing for personal information. They also can download malware to your device, which opens you up to risk for identity theft.

Tips to Spot a COVID-19 Text Message Scam:

- **Government agencies do not typically communicate through text messages.**
- **Ignore instructions to text “STOP” or “NO”** to prevent future texts. This is a common ploy by scammers to confirm they have a real, active phone number.
- **If you think your text message is real,** be sure it’s directing to a web address like “agency.gov” or “agency.ca,” not “agency.otherwebsite.com.”
- **Check for look-alikes.** Be sure to do your research and see if a government agency or organization actually exists. Find contact info on your own and call them to be sure the person you’ve heard from is legitimate.

For More Information

- Contact the Campton Hills Police Department 630-584-0330
- Read more about coronavirus scams on the [Federal Trade Commission’s website](#), and see BBB’s alert about [counterfeit face masks](#). Learn more about the disease at the [CDC’s FAQ page](#). Also, the [FDA is updating this page](#) about its progress in developing a treatment for coronavirus.
- If you’ve spotted a scam (whether or not you’ve lost money), report it to [BBB.org/ScamTracker](#). Your report can help others avoid falling victim to scams.