



Scam Watch

Scam Watch: COVID-19 Edition

You may have heard that the ongoing pandemic has caused an unprecedented spike in cybercrime. That's the bad news. The good news? We've got your back! Some ripoffs to keep an eye on:

Bogus tests. The FBI is warning about phony COVID-19 tests sold by scammers who want either fast cash or your personal info. Here are some telltales that the "test" is a scam: claims of FDA approval that can't be verified; ads through social media, email or phone calls; offers of "free" tests or sketchy incentives for getting tested; and offers to test you in exchange for cash.

Contact cons. Contact tracing is a vital tool in the fight against COVID-19, but it has also become a favorite way for scam artists to steal money and personal information. The goal of contact tracing is to track down people who've been exposed and encourage them to isolate themselves, but fraudsters posing as contact tracers send out bogus texts and emails asking for bank account information, Social Security numbers, and money.

Bad bennies. Another favorite pandemic-related scheme is unemployment fraud, in which the crooks steal victims' identities and use them to apply for benefits. The Secret Service is moving to stamp out these sophisticated rings, which have popped up all over. If you receive any communication related to your employment status, be skeptical!

Regulatory ripoffs. Fraudsters are citing the coronavirus as the cause of new (bogus) regulations around shipping—and charging victims an arm and a leg. The criminals send out phishing messages hoping to ensnare a victim who's ordered goods online, then falsely claim additional fees or insurance are required due to the pandemic.

Charity hilarity. It's no secret that income taxes are always a popular driver of fraud. Now the IRS is warning consumers about phony COVID-19-related charities, allegedly seeking a cure or vaccine. All they're really seeking is your money!