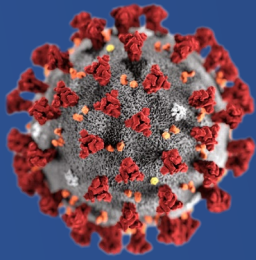


AVOID COVID-19 RELATED SCAMS



Pinellas County Consumer Protection warns citizens that scammers are attempting to steal your money and information through COVID-19-related scams. Learn how to protect yourself.

- Scammers may try to contact you by **phone, email, social media or text message**.
- **Don't click on links** or open emails from sources you're not familiar with.
- **Don't answer telephone calls from numbers you don't recognize** or calls that don't identify the number. **If you happen to answer a scam call, just hang up.** Don't press any numbers even if it offers to let you speak to a live person or to remove you from their call list.
- **Ignore offers for COVID-19 treatments, vaccines or home testing kits.**
- **Consult your physician before taking any medications** or supplements.
- Your **stimulus check** will automatically be direct deposited or mailed to you by the IRS. You don't need to do anything. For more information contact the IRS directly at 1800-829-1040 or visit www.IRS.gov/coronavirus.
- No one has early access to the stimulus checks and can't expedite the money. **You are not required to pay a fee to get your money.**
- Government agencies such as the IRS or Social Security Administration **will not call, text, email or contact you** on social media to request information.
- You will **continue to receive your social security benefits even if the offices are closed.** For more information contact the Social Security Administration directly at 1800-772-1213 or visit www.ssa.gov.
- All charities soliciting within or from Florida are required to register and file financial information with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (some exclusions). **To check out a charity call 1-800-435-7352** or visit their [website](#).
- To **report suspected COVID-19 related fraud**, contact the National Center for Disaster Fraud hotline at 1-866-720-4721 or disaster@leo.gov.
- For more information on local scams visit www.pinellascounty.org/consumer



AVOID COVID-19 RELATED SCAMS



SCAMS TO BE AWARE OF



FAKE CHARITIES

In the wake of a crisis fraudulent charities pop up overnight to exploit you. They pull on your heartstrings and then at your purse strings, anything to get your money.



STIMULUS CHECK SCAM

You're told to provide your personal and banking information. It's "necessary" to verify your identity to process your stimulus check or set-up for direct deposit.



PRICE GOUGING

During this State of Emergency, the demand for essentials like face masks and hand sanitizers has greatly increased. Scammers are taking advantage of the situation by offering essential commodities at inflated prices that grossly exceed the average cost.



SUSPENSION OF SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS

Claims to be from the Social Security Administration notifying you that your social security benefits are being suspended immediately due to suspicious behavior or due to COVID-19 related office closures.



MALICIOUS EMAILS, WEBSITES AND APPS

Malicious emails that appear to be sent from legitimate sources such as the CDC or WHO, as well as fake websites and apps that appear to share the latest virus-related information. Once you open, click or download, the scammer can gain and lock access to your devices and hold it for ransom.



FAKE ONLINE SURVEYS

Online promotions entice customers to fill out surveys in exchange for a free gift card or iPhones. The fake survey requests your personal and financial information, which then allows the scammer to access your accounts and or steal your identity.



FAKE CURES & TREATMENTS OR FREE COVID-19 TEST KITS

Fraudulent companies and individuals are selling products that claim to prevent or cure the coronavirus. Currently there is no cure or over the counter treatments. Others may offer free test kits to get you to provide personal information.



GRANDPARENT SCAM

Scammers pose as panicked grandchildren in trouble urging you to send money immediately-usually by purchasing a prepaid gift card or wire transfer. They say they need the money for an emergency like a hospital bill or to leave a foreign country.