

CORONAVIRUS: SCAMMERS FOLLOW THE HEADLINES

Scammers are taking advantage of fears surrounding the Coronavirus. They're setting up websites to sell bogus products, and using fake emails, texts, and social media posts as a ruse to take your money and get your personal information.

The emails and posts may be promoting awareness and prevention tips, and fake information about cases in your neighborhood. They also may be asking you to donate to victims, offering advice on unproven treatments, or contain malicious email attachments.

Here are some tips to help you keep the scammers at bay:

- [Don't click on links from sources you don't know](#). It could download a virus onto your computer or device. Make sure the anti-malware and anti-virus [software](#) on your computer is up to date.
- [Watch for emails claiming to be from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) or experts saying that have information about the virus. For the most up-to-date information about the Coronavirus, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) and the World Health Organization \(WHO\).](#)
- Ignore online offers for vaccinations. If you see ads touting prevention, treatment, or cure claims for the Coronavirus, ask yourself: if there's been a [medical breakthrough](#), would you be hearing about it for the first time through an ad or sales pitch?
- Do your homework when it comes to donations, whether through [charities](#) or crowdfunding sites. Don't let anyone rush you into making a donation. If someone wants donations in cash, by gift card, or by wiring money, don't do it.
- Be alert to "investment opportunities." The [U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission](#) (SEC) is warning people about online promotions, including on social media, claiming that the products or services of publicly-traded companies can prevent, detect, or cure coronavirus and that the stock of these companies will dramatically increase in value as a result.

Want more information on the latest scams we're seeing? Sign up for our [consumer alerts](#). If you come across any suspicious claims, report them to the FTC at [ftc.gov/complaint](https://www.ftc.gov/complaint).

CHECKS FROM THE GOVERNMENT

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As the Coronavirus takes a growing toll on people's pocketbooks, there are reports that the government will soon be sending money by check or direct deposit to each of us. The details are still being worked out, but there are a few really important things to know, no matter what this looks like.

1. The government will not ask you to pay anything up front to get this money. No fees. No charges. No nothing.
2. The government will not call to ask for your Social Security number, bank account, or credit card number. Anyone who does is a scammer.
3. These reports of checks aren't yet a reality. Anyone who tells you they can get you the money now is a scammer.

Look, normally we'd wait to know what the payment plan looks like before we put out a message like this. But these aren't normal times. And we predict that the scammers are gearing up to take advantage of this.

So, remember: no matter what this payment winds up being, only scammers will ask you to pay to get it. If you spot one of these scams, please tell the Federal Trade Commission: www.ftc.gov/complaint. We're doing our best to stop these scammers in their tracks, and your report will help.

FTC, FDA SEND WARNING LETTERS TO SEVEN COMPANIES ABOUT UNSUPPORTED CLAIMS THAT PRODUCTS CAN TREAT OR PREVENT CORONAVIRUS

The Federal Trade Commission and U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) have sent warning letters to seven companies allegedly selling unapproved products that may violate federal law by making deceptive or scientifically unsupported claims about their ability to treat coronavirus (COVID-19). The warning letters are the first issued by the agencies alleging unapproved and/or unsupported claims that products can treat or prevent coronavirus.

The agencies sent the letters to the following companies: 1) [Vital Silver](#), 2) [Quinessence Aromatherapy Ltd.](#), 3) [N-ergetics](#), 4) [GuruNanda, LLC](#), 5) [Vivify Holistic Clinic](#), 6) [Herbal Amy LLC](#), and 7) [The Jim Bakker Show](#).

The recipients are companies that advertise products—including teas, essential oils, and colloidal silver—as able to treat or prevent coronavirus. According to the FDA, however, there are no approved vaccines, drugs, or investigational products currently available to treat or prevent the virus.

“There already is a high level of anxiety over the potential spread of coronavirus,” said FTC Chairman Joe Simons. “What we don't need in this situation are companies preying on consumers by promoting products with fraudulent prevention and treatment claims. These warning letters are just the first step. We're prepared to take enforcement actions against companies that continue to market this type of scam.”

“The FDA considers the sale and promotion of fraudulent COVID-19 products to be a threat to the public health. We have an aggressive surveillance program that routinely monitors online sources for health fraud products, especially during a significant public health issue such as this one. The FDA's laws are designed to protect the public health by ensuring, among other things, that drugs are safe and effective for their intended uses,” said FDA Commissioner Stephen M. Hahn, M.D.

“We understand consumers are concerned about the spread of COVID-19 and urge them to talk to their health care providers, as well as follow advice from other federal agencies about how to prevent the spread of this illness. We will continue to aggressively pursue

those that place the public health at risk and hold bad actors accountable,” the FDA Commissioner concluded.

In the letters, the FTC states that one or more of the efficacy claims made by the marketers are unsubstantiated and therefore may violate the FTC Act. The letters advise the recipients to immediately cease making all claims that their products can treat or cure coronavirus.

The letters note that if the false claims do not cease, the Commission may seek a federal court injunction and an order requiring money to be refunded to consumers. Finally, they instruct the recipients to notify the FTC within 48 hours of the specific actions they have taken to address the agency’s concerns.

In addition to following up with companies that fail to make adequate corrections, the FTC and FDA will continue to monitor social media, online marketplaces, and incoming complaints to help ensure that the companies do not continue to market fraudulent products under a different name or on another website.

Information for Consumers

The FTC recently issued a new consumer blog post with information about how to identify and avoid coronavirus-related scams. [Coronavirus: Scammers follow the headlines](#) notes that scammers are setting up websites to sell bogus products, and using fake emails, texts, and social media posts as a ruse to take consumers’ money and get their personal information. It then warns consumers of the “red flags” to be aware of when shopping for products related to the virus.