



# FRAUD SQUAD ALERT

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## MORE CORONAVIRUS SCAMS

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WEDNESDAY, APRIL 01, 2020

### **Robocalls and stimulus check scams: two forms of fraud expected to increase due to coronavirus.**

When news captures the public's attention – think major hurricanes, terrorist attacks, and economic slowdowns – scammers come out of the woodwork to take advantage of legitimate fears and concerns. With coronavirus dominating the news globally, there is an unprecedented opportunity for criminals to use the public's fears about the virus and the resulting economic downturn to defraud consumers. Two types of scams that are increasing due to coronavirus: **robocalls and stimulus check scams**.

#### **Coronavirus-related robocalls**

Robocalls are, at the very least, a major annoyance for most consumers. However, as the coronavirus has upended daily life, robocall operators have quickly shifted to blasting out spam phone calls offering all manner of coronavirus-related products and services. YouMail, a cloud-based telecommunications provider that tracks robocall volumes, estimates that at least one million robocalls per day are inundating Americans' cell phones. **Fraudulent robocallers are offering air duct sanitation services, work-from-home opportunities, cut-rate health insurance, and immune-system boosting nutritional supplements. Other robocalls have reportedly offered free insulin kits to diabetics, along with free coronavirus testing kits.**

Our advice to consumers is simple:

1. If you receive a call from a number you don't recognize, the safest course of action is simply to ignore the call.
2. If you answer a call and suspect it's a robocall, simply hang up. Don't press any of the numbers the message tells you to.
3. Never give any personal information, such as financial account number, Social Security number, full name, or mailing address to someone who contacts you via an unsolicited phone call or text message.
4. Do not click on any links sent to you via text message from someone you don't know. They could lead you to malware or phishing websites.
5. If you're being inundated by robocalls, your cellular provider may offer services that will increase the likelihood that the calls will be blocked.

#### **Stimulus check scams**

Last week, President Trump signed the biggest stimulus bill in U.S. history into law. Most American adults will receive a stimulus of \$1,200 or more in the coming weeks thanks to

the legislation. Crooks are already using these promised payments as a way to defraud consumers. **Scams that have been reported involve crooks promising to expedite payment in exchange for a fee, impersonating a government official, and requesting sensitive personal information in order to process a check.** Inaccurate social media posts have also circulated suggesting that consumers need to fill out the 2020 Census before they can receive a stimulus check.

Consumers can protect themselves from these scams by learning to spot these red flags:

- The stimulus checks will be deposited automatically by direct deposit into consumers' bank accounts for the vast majority of citizens who filed their taxes last year. Consumers without a bank account on record with the IRS will receive a paper check, but it may take several weeks longer to arrive than those who have bank accounts.
- Anyone who emails, texts, messages, or calls you claiming to be able to expedite your stimulus check is a scammer.
- Anyone who contacts you requesting sensitive information like PayPal account details, bank account information, or credit card numbers is trying to scam you.
- Your answers to the Census, and whether you've completed it, have no impact on your eligibility for a stimulus check.

These are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to coronavirus-related scams. If you've been on the receiving end of a coronavirus-related phone call, email, or text message that you think is a scam, we want to hear from you! By filing a complaint at **Fraud.org** via our **secure online complaint form** you can help law enforcement bring scammers to justice. We share complaints with our network of nearly 200 law enforcement and consumer protection agency partners who can and do put fraudsters behind bars. **Scams can also be reported by phone to the FTC: 1-877-382-4357.**

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Medicare.gov

You may already be taking steps to protect your health during the COVID-19 emergency. Be sure to also protect your identity from scammers by **guarding your Medicare Number**.

It's easy to get distracted and let your guard down during these uncertain times. **Scammers may try to steal your Medicare Number. They might lie about sending you Coronavirus vaccines, tests, masks, or other items in exchange for your Medicare Number or personal information.**

Protect yourself from scams:

- Only share your Medicare Number with your primary and specialty care doctors, participating Medicare pharmacist, hospital, health insurer, or other trusted healthcare provider.
- Check your Medicare claims summary forms for errors.

**To report Medicare fraud: 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227)**