

Beware of fraud and scams during the COVID-19 pandemic

Criminals are using the COVID-19 pandemic to scam the public - don't become a victim.

COVID-19, the disease caused by the new coronavirus, is now officially a worldwide pandemic. Criminals all over the world are using this crisis to scam the public, targeting vulnerable groups as they seek to capitalise on the pandemic. Action Fraud, the UK's national fraud reporting service, reported a 400% increase in coronavirus-related fraud in March 2020.

The Police and other government bodies are working together to spread information about these scams and ensure the public is vigilant against fraud.

The Crown Prosecution Service has shared the following advice:

Stop: Taking a moment to stop and think before parting with your money or information could keep you safe.

Challenge: Could it be fake? It's ok to reject, refuse or ignore any requests. Only criminals will try to rush or panic you.

Protect: Contact your bank immediately if you think you've fallen for a scam and report it to Action Fraud.

We have taken the time to go through the various reports of scamming and made a list for you to watch out for.

*Please note that the list is by no means exhaustive, and criminals can find other ways of targeting individuals so always be vigilant.

- **Virus Testing:** Virus testing kits are only offered by the NHS in the UK.
- **Vaccines/Cures:** There is currently no vaccine or cure for COVID-19.
- **Counterfeit Products:** There has been a surge in overpriced or fake goods to protect yourself from the coronavirus. These include antibacterial gels, masks etc.
- **Shopping/Medication Delivery:** Criminals targeting vulnerable people on their doorstep and offering to do their shopping or deliver medicine.
- **Cleaning Services:** Offering cleansing services to prevent spread of the virus.
- **Phishing emails/text messages:** Beware of messages tricking you into opening malicious attachments which could lead do fraudsters gaining access to personal information.

The following e-mails have been identified by Action Fraud:

1. Fraudsters pretending to be from a research group that mimic the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and World Health Organisation (WHO). They claim to provide the victim with a list of active infections in their area.
2. Fraudsters providing articles about the virus outbreak with a link to a fake company website where victims are encouraged to click to subscribe to a daily newsletter for further updates.
3. Fraudsters sending investment scheme and trading advice encouraging people to take advantage of the coronavirus downturn.

4. Fraudsters pretending to be from HMRC offering a tax refund and directing victims to a fake website to collect their personal and financial details.

If you or someone you know has been targeted by a scam, you should report it to Action Fraud online at www.actionfraud.police.uk/ or by calling 0300 123 2040.

For advice and information on how to check if something might be a scam, visit:

www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/scams/check-if-something-might-be-a-scam/.

This translation was prepared on a voluntary basis by our wonderful team of freelance translators