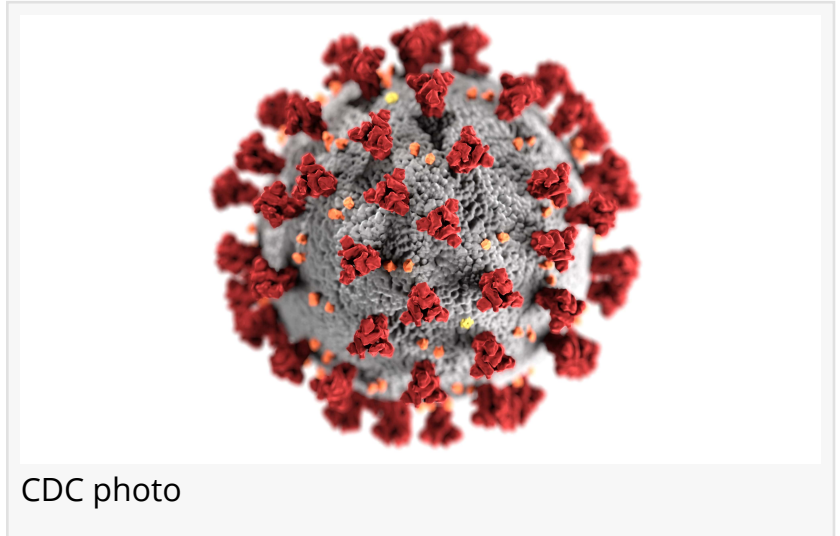


Beware: As coronavirus circulates, scammers follow close behind

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, USA, March 26, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ -- As fearful Californians shelter in place and shudder over every apocalyptic news story about the coronavirus, scammers see something else — dollar signs.

Think about it: Parents working from home while managing school-aged children are distracted. They grow weary and let their guard down, and open an email they shouldn't have. Many scared Baby Boomers, the most vulnerable to the most harmful effects of the virus, are looking for miracle cures and good news from helpful sources — even strangers.



The FBI considers California one of the states most vulnerable to coronavirus scammers, along with New York and Washington. This includes spoof or phishing emails, texts and aggressive phone calls.

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Harry Kazakian, Los Angeles security and investigative expert

There's also been an explosion in false advertising of products claiming to prevent and cure COVID-19, leveraging many Californians' distrust of official government and health sources such as the CDC. The FBI arrested a California actor on March 25 for selling what he claimed was an injectable "cure," "prevention pills," and for seeking investors among his 2.5 million Instagram followers.

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pandemic,” said [Harry Kazakian](#), a Los Angeles security and investigative expert and former EMT/paramedic.

There are relatively easy steps you can take to stay safe. “For instance, you can hover your mouse over an email address or a link, in Outlook or a web browser, and a small window will pop up to show where the link goes to. If the real link does not match with the sender or with what you expect, don't click it,” Kazakian said.

Remember, a legit website link must end with the company's name and not a bunch of numbers or letters that make no sense. Something sent from the CDC is always [@cdc.gov](#), for example. An email claiming to come from the CDC but ending in anything else is a scam, he said.

Follow the FBI's advice: Be wary of any business, charity, or individual requesting payments in cash, by wire transfer, gift card or through the mail.

The sudden appearance of "treatments" on the market could not only separate you from your money, they may also pose a genuine risk to your health.

"We've seen an explosion in colloidal silver, ionic silver, herbal teas, and even essential oils like eucalyptus all hocked as coronavirus treatments or cures," said [Robert Tauler](#), a Los Angeles attorney who specializes in false advertising law and supplement litigation. "There is no evidence to support their claims, and they must by law make that crystal clear to consumers."

Protect yourself with these tips:

1. Don't trust "Coronavirus" or "COVID-19" subject headers

These words represent the most "clickable" enticement there is right now, because the pandemic is top-of-mind, Kazakian said. Emails and texts with these words will urge you to click a link that will enable cybercriminals to steal personal information or, ironically, infect your computer or smartphone with a virus.

2. Beware of fake charity come-ons

Your goodwill makes you vulnerable if you don't take extra steps. Sharing your credit card number to donate to something like, "International Childrens' Coronavirus Relief Fund" could relieve you of more funds than you banked on. Remember, there are no vaccines and no cures.

3. Let it go to voicemail

Criminals are pretty shrewd at making their phone calls appear to originate from your area code. If you don't recognize the number, or even if your smartphone suggests that the incoming call originated with a local utility or agency, ALWAYS let it go to voicemail. "Most robocalls will not leave a message, so you can just block the number," Kazakian said. Government agencies — including Medicare, Social Security and the IRS — will never call you or leave a message.

4. Know who you're buying from

This isn't the time to buy masks online from a seller you're unfamiliar with. Besides the obvious risk of handing over crucial personal information, you may unwittingly buy used, defective or counterfeit items. That mask may do nothing. That dozen bottles of hand sanitizer may never arrive. And avoid opening accounts with brand new online services you've never heard of: they could be another way of getting your information. Do your research.

5. Remember: There is no immunization or "home test kit."

There are no approved home test kits for coronavirus and no vaccines, period. Any offer claiming otherwise is a scam. Keep checking [CDC.gov](#) to stay informed.

6. Fraudulent supplements are flooding the market

The dangers of taking herbal products promising to treat a novel and deadly disease cannot be understated. "At worst, consumers without access to medical care may forego medical treatment based on false claims," Tauler said. "At minimum, consumers will shell out hard earned money for fake products that will do nothing to keep them safe."

7. Fake remedies could kill you

If you're taking prescription medications, products falsely touted as coronavirus cures could interfere with their effectiveness. And keep in mind that these products may arrive contaminated with other ingredients or pharmaceuticals not listed on the label, especially products coming from China where factory production guidelines are lax or ignored.

One more thing: Older people are more vulnerable to fall for scams, and that makes them a

favorite target for criminals and charlatans.

Regularly check in with the senior citizens in your life and look for warning signs – the sudden appearance of a new “friend” who calls or emails often, or some urgent business at a bank or Western Union. Help your senior family and friends learn to block suspicious emails, phone numbers and texts. Enlist help from your local senior advocacy organization if you need someone to back you up.

RESOURCES:

California Consumer Fraud information: <https://oag.ca.gov/consumers>

AARP California Fraud Watch Network: <https://states.aarp.org/tag/aarp-california-fraud-watch-network>

Federal Trade Commission Consumer Information:

https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/blog/2020/03/checks-government?utm_source=govdelivery

Food and Drug Administration COVID-19 information: <https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/coronavirus-covid-19-update-fda-alerts-consumers-about-unauthorized-fraudulent-covid-19-test-kits>

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