



COVID-19 Consumer Warnings and Safety Tips



Sierra Investment Management is providing this recent Federal Communications Commission (FCC) report of COVID-19 related fraud attempts as a public service to help you stay safe.



TEXT/EMAIL

Both the Federal Trade Commission and the U.S. Food & Drug Administration have posted consumer warnings about fake websites and phishing or scam emails offering free home testing kits, sales of health insurance, promotion of bogus cures, and other virus-related concerns.

Additionally, some text scams are impersonating government agencies. The FCC recently learned of a text scam claiming to be from the “FCC Financial Care Center” and offering \$30,000 in COVID-19 relief. There is no FCC program to provide relief funds to consumers. The text is likely a phishing attempt to get banking or other personal information from victims. Another text message scam impersonating the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services informs recipients that they must take a “mandatory online COVID-19 test” using an included link.

Text message hoaxes appearing to be from a “next door neighbor” may claim that the government will order a mandatory national two-week quarantine, or instruct you to go out and stock up on supplies. The National Security Council tweeted that these are fake.

Protect yourself from fraudulent ad or offer texts by not clicking on links in texts related to the virus and double checking that texts are from a sender known to you.

A trustworthy online resource for the most current information is [cdc.gov/coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus).



PHONE/ROBOCALL

The World Health Organization recently issued a warning about criminals seeking to take advantage of the pandemic to steal money or sensitive personal information from consumers, and the FCC has received reports of robocalls purporting to offer free virus test kits in an effort to collect consumers’ personal and health insurance information. One pernicious version of this scam is targeting higher risk individuals with diabetes, offering a free COVID-19 testing kit along with a free diabetic monitor. Opportunists are also making robocalls to offer HVAC duct cleaning as a way to “protect” your home and family from the virus.

Fraudsters are also preying on financial fears tied to the pandemic. The FCC is aware of robocall scams with COVID-19 themed work-from-home opportunities, student loan repayment plans, and debt consolidation offers.

Consumers aren't the only target. Small businesses are also getting scam calls about virus-related funding or loans and online listing verification.

Be wary of phone calls and text messages that purport to be from the WHO or charity organizations, asking for account information or for money or from robocalls asking for payment over the phone.



SPECIAL NOTE RE: STIMULUS CHECKS

Many consumers are receiving checks as part of the Federal Government's response to the coronavirus. Please be aware that no one will call or text you to verify your personal information or bank account details in order to "release" the funds. The Treasury Department expects most people to receive their payments via direct-deposit information that the department has on file from prior tax filings.



WHAT TO DO

The FCC offers the following tips to help you protect yourself from scams, including coronavirus scams:

- Do not respond to calls or texts from unknown numbers, or any others that appear suspicious.
- Never share your personal or financial information via email, text messages, or over the phone.
- Be cautious if you're being pressured to share any information or make a payment immediately.
- Scammers often spoof phone numbers to trick you into answering or responding. Remember that government agencies will never call you to ask for personal information or money.
- Do not click any links in a text message. If a friend sends you a text with a suspicious link that seems out of character, call them to make sure they weren't hacked.
- Always check on a charity (for example, by calling or looking at its actual website) before donating.

For more information about scam calls and texts, visit the **FCC Consumer Help Center** and the **FCC Scam Glossary**. You can also file a complaint about such scams at [fcc.gov/complaints](https://www.fcc.gov/complaints).

If you think you've been a victim of a coronavirus scam, contact law enforcement immediately.



Invest wisely. Rest easy.

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