COVID-19 Scams and Fraud

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, scammers are still at work cheating people out of their money. They steal personal information and sell things that don't work or should actually be free. Scammers use robocalls, social media, phishing emails, and other ways to take advantage of people's fears, anxieties, and confusion around COVID-19. Learn how to spot misinformation and be on the lookout for COVID-19 scams and fraud.

How to Spot COVID-19 Misinformation

Misinformation is often used to trick people into falling for a scam. Know what to look for, and ask yourself these questions to check if the information is trustworthy:

- **How does it make me feel?**
  If the information evokes strong feelings, like anger, fear, or anxiety, it may be a scam. Focus on the facts. Misinformation is heavy on emotion and light on facts.
- **Does the information seem vague or incomplete? Are there missing pieces to the story?**
  Look for complete details. Be sure the author provides proof and explains how they came to their conclusion.
- **What are reputable sources saying about the issue?**
  Have the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) or the World Health Organization (WHO) made a statement about the issue? It is always best to check information against known, trusted sources. Learn how to find reliable health information at ph.lacounty.gov/hccp/health.htm.
- **Is someone trying to sell me something or asking for my personal information?**
  This is almost always a red flag. Read below for examples of COVID-19 scams and fraud. Learn more at ph.lacounty.gov/hccp/scams.htm.

COVID-19 Vaccine Scams

Watch out for scammers pushing lies to trick you. Here are some vaccine scams that are currently out there.
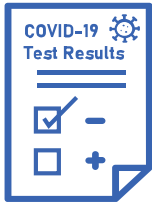
- **Charging people to receive the vaccine.**
  - Vaccines are free for everyone, regardless of immigration status, even if you don't have insurance. Vaccines are widely available throughout Los Angeles County. **No appointment is needed** at many locations and you will not be asked about your **immigration status**. In-home vaccination is available to people with mobility issues.
  - Learn more at VaccinateLAcounty.com or call the DPH Vaccine Call Center at 1-833-540-0473.
- **Selling 'the vaccine' that will be sent directly to your home.**
  - COVID-19 vaccines are not being sold directly to the public and must be given by a licensed healthcare provider. Anything that is sent to you will not be a real vaccine.
- **Requesting your personal information by phone, text, or email to receive a vaccine or cash prize.**
  - Scammers may ask you to respond immediately with your personal information, like social security, bank account, or credit card number.
- **Selling a COVID-19 Vaccination Record.**
  - Do not click on links you do not recognize or trust a website that offers proof of vaccination in exchange for money. You should never have to pay for a copy of your COVID-19 vaccination record.

- o Everyone who is vaccinated in California can request a free digital COVID-19 Vaccination Record. Visit **myvaccinerecord.cdph.ca.gov**. See details on vaccine records webpage at VaccinateLAcounty.com.

A lot of misinformation is going around about COVID-19 vaccines. Check out some common vaccine myths and facts on the VaccinateLAcounty.com webpage.

COVID-19 Testing Fraud

- **Unauthorized or fake test kits sold online.**
  - o Before you buy a test kit online, check the website that is selling it. Find out if the test is authorized on the FDA EUA test webpage. Learn about at-home COVID-19 testing, visit the CDC self-testing webpage or the FDA's At-Home Tests.
- **Fake test results**
  - o Public events, businesses, and community places may require proof of vaccination or a recent negative COVID-19 test before you can enter.
  - o The only valid way to get proof that you're vaccinated -or that you test negative- is to GET vaccinated or to TEST negative.
- **Charging for tests that should be free**
  - o **COVID-19 testing is available for free to anyone in LA County**, *regardless of immigration status*. If you're sick or may have been exposed to COVID-19, visit covid19.lacounty.gov/testing or call 2-1-1 to sign up for a test. Learn more about COVID-19 tests at ph.lacounty.gov/covidtests.

Contact Tracing Scams

- **Scammers might pose as contact tracers to get personal information.**
  - o Public Health **is** reaching out to people who have COVID-19 and their contacts. Always check the caller ID or phone number. Caller ID will show as "LA PublicHealth" or 1-833-641-0305.
  - o Public Health contact tracers will <u>never</u> ask about your immigration status or request money or a social security number. If Public Health calls or send you a message, please call back to help stop COVID-19.

Fake medical treatments and "miracle cures"

- **Advertisements for supplements and "treatments" that falsely claim to prevent or cure COVID-19.**
  - o Always ask a doctor or other licensed healthcare professional before taking any medicine, supplement, or health product. Some of the "treatments" that are promoted online have been shown not to work, have not been tested so we don't know if they work, or are harmful.

Fake "helpers" offering deliveries and errands

- **Scammers might offer to help while you are at home and then run off with your money.**
  - o Have essential supplies like food and medicines delivered by a trusted friend or well-known service.
  - o Sign up for free food and meals delivery at LA County's Food Resources page, or the Senior Meals Emergency Response Program. You can also call this program at 1-800-510-2020. For other options, visit 211LA or call 2-1-1.

Fake charities

- **Do your homework when it comes to donations.**
    - Many people want to help others in the community who are suffering but scammers can take advantage of their good will.
- **Don't let anyone rush you into making a donation**.
    - Check if the charity is legitimate by searching the CA Attorney General's Registry of Charitable Trusts. Get additional tips on donating wisely at ftc.gov/charity.

Medical identity theft and phishing scams

- **Scammers go after personal information and money.**
    - NEVER provide your Medicare, Medi-Cal or Social Security number, or other personal information by phone, email, or text in response to an unsolicited contact.
- **Government agencies won't call to sell you anything or offer to 'enroll' you over the phone**.
    - Review these tips from medicare.gov on how to prevent Medicare fraud and from ssa.gov on Social Security scams.
- **Hang up on robocalls.**
    - If these illegal robocalls continue, get their information and report them to the Federal Trade Commission. To reduce the number of real sales calls, join the 'Do Not Call List'. Visit consumer.ftc.gov/articles/robocalls for more information.

Stay informed and get help

- View **recent scam warnings** at the LA County Department of Consumer and Business Affairs' consumer alerts.
- Sign up for **fraud alerts** from American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) and Federal Trade Commission.
- Find **healthcare, food,** and **essentials:** call the LA County information line at 2-1-1 or visit 211LA website.
- **Report a possible COVID-19 scam and get help trying to get your money back:** contact the LA County Department of Consumer and Business Affairs: dcba.lacounty.gov or 1-800-593-8222.
- **Report suspicious claims made about testing or treatment products:** at ftc.gov/complaint.
- Visit ph.lacounty.gov/coronavirus to find the latest information on COVID-19.