

Attorney General Frosh Warns Marylanders About Coronavirus Disease 2019 Scams

BALTIMORE, MD (March 6, 2020) – Maryland Attorney General Brian E. Frosh is warning Maryland residents to be on guard against scams involving the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (“COVID-19”). Scammers are setting up websites to sell bogus health products that claim to prevent or cure COVID-19, and using fake emails, texts, and social media posts about COVID-19 as a ruse to steal money and personal information.

“Scammers are taking advantage of people’s fear of getting sick from COVID-19. Consumers can avoid being cheated by understanding how these thieves are trying to steal their personal information and money,” said Attorney General Frosh.

Swindlers are posing as authorities, like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) or the World Health Organization (WHO). They send emails claiming to offer updated information about how people can protect themselves from COVID-19. Unsolicited emails from the CDC, WHO, or other “experts” saying they have information about the virus are likely phishing attempts to get money or personal information or may be attempting to download viruses or malware onto the recipient’s computer. The Attorney General’s office advises Marylanders not to click on suspicious links online or in emails for information, but to seek information about COVID-19 from reliable sources such as government health agencies. For the latest, most accurate information about COVID-19, Marylanders can go directly to the CDC (www.cdc.gov), WHO (www.who.it), or the Maryland Department of Health (www.health.maryland.gov).

There are no approved vaccines, drugs, or treatment products specifically for COVID-19 available for purchase online or in stores. Pitches for any health product claiming to prevent or cure coronavirus are almost certainly fraudulent. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) warns that fraudulent products not only fail to work, but they could also cause serious injury. Scammers may be promoting their fraudulent health products through newspapers, magazines, TV infomercials, email, social media sites like Facebook and Twitter, and online through websites and popup ads. Complaints against these fraudulent health claims can be filed with the Federal Trade Commission at www.ftccomplaintassistant.gov or the FDA (www.fda.gov).

Someone asking for donations - especially in cash, prepaid credit cards, gift cards, or bitcoin - to help victims of COVID-19, or for “research” into finding a vaccine or cure, is very likely a scammer. Sites like www.charitynavigator.org can be used to determine the legitimacy of a charity. Donors can also contact the Maryland Secretary of State’s Office at 800-825-4510 to verify that a charity is registered in Maryland as required by law.

The U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) is warning people about online promotions, including on social media, claiming that the products or services of publicly-traded companies can prevent, detect, or cure coronavirus (and that investment in these stocks will increase in value). Investors may lose significant amounts of money if they invest in companies making fraudulent claims. Alternatively, these could be “pump-and-dump” schemes in which promoters hype up a stock, get many people to invest, and then sell off their own shares quickly for a profit—before the end of the hype makes the stocks worthless.

COVID-19 scams can be reported to our Consumer Protection Division by calling 410-528-8662, or by filing a report with WHO (https://www.who.int/about/report_scam/en/) or the FTC (ftc.gov/complaint).

Montgomery County Board of Elections
Information on Virus Precautions for Election Workers
March 7, 2020

Montgomery County is committed to the safety and welfare of its employees, our clients, and residents. Since January, County government has been actively preparing for COVID-19 and we know that Montgomery County will be fully capable of meeting this new challenge. We pledge to continue to keep you well-informed as this situation changes. The most current information remains readily available at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/coronavirus. Also visit www.777vote.org regarding a statement from the State Board of Elections.

During Training:

We have been cleaning and disinfecting the voting equipment, cords, pens and tables with Clorox wipes after each class since the onset of training and prior to the outbreak. We also have hand sanitizer stations at our doors and in each classroom and office space. We are utilizing these efforts to safeguard everyone and prevent individuals from getting sick.

Preventive action election workers can take

- Stay at home if you have fever, respiratory symptoms, or believe you are sick.
- Practice routine cleaning of frequently touched surfaces: including tables, doorknobs, light switches, handles, desks, toilets, faucets, sinks, etc.
- Disinfect surfaces that may be contaminated with germs after cleaning: Labels contain instructions for safe and effective use of the cleaning product including precautions you should take when applying the product, such as wearing gloves and making sure you have good ventilation during use of the product.
- Practice hand hygiene frequently: wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Clean and disinfect electronics (e.g., laptops, tablets, keyboards) routinely. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products.

Preventive action polling workers can take for themselves and the general public

Based on available data, the most important measures to prevent transmission of viruses in crowded public areas include careful and consistent cleaning of one's hands. Therefore:

- Bathrooms at the polling station will be supplied with soap, water, and drying materials so visitors and staff can wash their hands.

The Election Director and management of the Board of Elections are working closely with other departments in Montgomery County and within the State of Maryland to coordinate our approach to preventing the spread of Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19). We are also consulting with other election officials across the country, the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, the Centers for Disease Control, and the Department of Homeland Security to ensure that we follow best practices for handling ballots and other voting materials and for disinfecting surfaces and equipment in each polling place as Election Day approaches.