

NEWS RELEASE

Released by: Gordon J. MacDonald, Attorney General

Subject: Attorney General's COVID-19 Scam Alert: Stimulus Payments

Date: Tuesday, April 14, 2020

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Concord, NH -- Attorney General Gordon J. MacDonald urges all of New Hampshire's aging adults to be aware of and to take steps to protect themselves from scams related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, all people are encouraged to assist aging adults in protecting themselves from scams to the fullest and safest extent possible.

In recent weeks, scammers have used the uncertainty and isolation brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic to attempt to obtain personal identifying information and assets of aging adults across the country. Below is a list of some of the scams currently aimed at aging adults, as well as recommendations on what to do if you encounter them.

Social Security Scam

- Scammers claiming to be from the Social Security Administration (SSA) call a recipient and claim that due to the closing of SSA offices, the recipient's benefits will be interrupted unless he or she provides personal identifying information, such as a social security or bank account number. The truth is that the SSA, despite its closure of some offices, has advised that these closures should not interrupt receipt of benefits. **Importantly, the SSA will not call a recipient unexpectedly and ask for personal information over the telephone.** If you receive a call like this, hang up, and report it to the SSA: <https://oig.ssa.gov/>

Medical Scams

- Scammers are calling aging adults pretending to be a family member (often a grandson or granddaughter) and claiming they are in need of money to treat COVID-19 symptoms. Sometimes, the caller will ask the aging adult to send gift cards or cash for payment. These types of calls are called "Grandparent scams." They can be frightening and distressing. **If you receive a call like this, you should hang up immediately.** You are encouraged to reach out to the alleged family member or other trusted individual using a known telephone number to verify. Further, you should be skeptical of any random telephone call you receive requesting money, and in particular gift cards and cash.
- Scammers are contacting individuals by telephone, e-mail, and sometimes in-person, offering COVID-19 home test kits, medicines, or vaccinations. **Currently, no vaccines, pills, potions, lotions, medications, or other prescription or over-the-counter products are available to treat or cure Coronavirus disease.** This applies to offers made online, in stores, by electronic message, or over the telephone. Please do not allow any individual offering these products into your home. If you encounter someone claiming to offer such products, contact local law enforcement.

Stimulus Scams

- With many aging adults set to receive stimulus payments from the federal government, scammers are calling, texting, and e-mailing aging adults claiming to work for federal agencies, such as the Internal Revenue Service, and that they are in need of the aging adult's personal identifying information prior to stimulus payment disbursement. **Please know that no federal agency is going to call, text, or e-mail requesting social security, banking, or any other personal identifying information. If you receive such a call, hang up.** As with any scam telephone call, do not push any buttons for "more information." If you receive a text message or e-mail of this nature, delete it and do not click on any links within the message.

Fake Charity Scams

- Scammers are contacting aging adults claiming to be from reputable charities or otherwise fictitious charitable organizations, seeking donations for a variety of causes related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of these scammers request payment in the form of gift cards or electronic currency, such as bitcoin. **You should be skeptical if you receive a call unexpectedly from a "charity" requesting a donation.** Donate only to charities that you know and trust and only after you independently verify that the payment/donation system is safe and secure.

How to protect yourself and aging adults:

All people are encouraged to assist aging adults, and specifically those who may be especially vulnerable, in their efforts to avoid falling victim to these and all other scams. Recommendations for assistance include:

- For those who care for an aging parent or other adult, practicing added vigilance and not providing the personal, identifiable information of an aging adult, without verifying the recipient's identity;
- While maintaining appropriate social distancing and adhering to the Emergency Orders in place in New Hampshire, checking in with aging friends and relatives by phone or other electronic means;
- Asking questions of aging friends and relatives about what they are doing, who they have heard from, and if they need supplies or assistance; and
- Ultimately assisting any aging adult if and when there is a reasonable belief that they have fallen victim to a scam.

Stay Informed:

- For up-to-date information about the COVID-19 outbreak in New Hampshire visit: www.nh.gov/covid19
- For more information about Scams and how to protect yourself, visit:
 - www.doj.nh.gov/covid-19-scams/
 - www.consumer.ftc.gov/

Reporting

- Anyone receiving scam communications related to Covid-19 or otherwise, is encouraged to make a report to the New Hampshire Consumer Protection Hotline:
 - Phone: 1-888-468-4454, Email: DOJ-CPB@doj.nh.gov
 - Website: www.doj.nh.gov/consumer/complaints/
- Further, the public is encouraged to report suspected fraud schemes related to COVID-19 by contacting the National Center for Disaster Fraud (NCDF):
 - Phone: 1-866-720-5721
 - E-mail: disaster@leo.gov