

COVID-19 Vaccine Fraud Alert

The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) Office of Inspector General (OIG) issued a new Fraud Alert regarding scams related to the COVID-19 vaccine.

Scammers are offering COVID-19 vaccines to SHBP and SEHBP members in exchange for personal details, including Medicare information. The services offered are illegitimate and not approved.

Scammers approach beneficiaries via telemarketing calls, social media, and by knocking on doors. They use information collected from victims to commit medical identity theft and fraudulent billing.

Potential COVID-19 vaccine schemes are listed below:

- Advertisements or offers for early access to a vaccine upon payment of a deposit or fee;
- Requests asking members to pay out of pocket to obtain a vaccine or put their name on a vaccine waiting list;
- Offers to undergo additional medical testing or procedures when obtaining a vaccine;
- Marketers offering to sell and/or ship doses of a vaccine in exchange for payment of a deposit or fee;
- Unsolicited emails, telephone calls, or personal contact from someone claiming to be from a medical office, insurance company, or COVID-19 vaccine center requesting personal and/or medical information to determine recipients' eligibility to participate in clinical vaccine trials or obtain the vaccine;
- Claims of FDA approval for a vaccine that cannot be verified;
- Advertisements for vaccines through social media platforms, email, telephone calls, online, or from unsolicited/unknown sources; and
- Individuals contacting members in person, by phone, or by email to tell them the government or government officials requires them to receive a COVID-19 vaccine.

Trusted Information and Resources can be found at the FTC and through your carrier at

- The Federal Trade Commission: <https://www.ftc.gov/coronavirus/scams-consumer-advice>
- The Center for Medicare Services: <https://www.medicare.gov/medicare-coronavirus>
- Aetna Medicare Advantage Subscribers: [Aetna Covid-19 Resources](#)
- Horizon Subscribers: [Horizon Covid 19 Resources](#)
- New Jersey Division of Pensions & Benefits: [NJDPB – COVID Information](#)



COVID-19 facts, fictions & fakes



In times of crisis, it's not uncommon for some to take advantage of a situation by offering false hope, fake cures and scams. It's important to stay informed and educated about what is out there, what is real, what is fake, and what could cause more damage than help.

Facts about COVID-19

- There is currently no cure for COVID-19, only treatments.
- Vaccines are now available at no cost to you.
- Vitamins, mineral supplements and certain foods cannot cure or prevent COVID-19.
- Antibiotics cannot prevent or treat COVID-19 because it is viral, not bacterial. Antibiotics fight bacterial infections.

Avoiding scams and harmful "cures"

The Internet can be full of misinformation. A quick Internet search will pull up information on cures and treatments for COVID-19 that are not only false, but in some cases, dangerous and deadly.

There are also people ready to scam those who may not know the facts, making phone calls and requesting personal information. Be wary of anyone who may call, text or email you asking for personal information or requesting money.

How to avoid COVID-19 scams

There are ways to stay safe and avoid falling victim to a scam or fake cure.

- Before seeking any treatment to help fight or prevent COVID-19, speak to your doctor.
- For information on New Jersey's vaccine administration phases, please visit the [New Jersey COVID-19 Information Hub](#).
- If you live outside of New Jersey or are temporarily living outside of New Jersey, please visit the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) website to learn about your state's vaccine administration plan.
- Visit the [CDC's](#) website and the [FDA's](#) resources to get the most up-to-date information on COVID-19.

Tips from the Federal Trade Commission

How to Spot, Avoid and Report CORONAVIRUS SCAMS

Scammers are taking advantage of fears surrounding the Coronavirus. The Federal Trade Commission (ftc.gov/coronavirus) offers these tips to help you *fight back*.

Treatments & Cures

Ignore online offers for vaccinations and home test kits. If you see ads touting prevention, treatment, or cure claims for the Coronavirus, stop. If there's a medical breakthrough, you're not going to hear about it for the first time from an ad or sales pitch. At this time, there also are no FDA-authorized home test kits for the Coronavirus.

Email and Text Scams

Don't click on links from sources you don't know. It could download a virus onto your computer or device. Make sure the anti-malware and anti-virus software on your computer is up to date.

Robocalls

Hang up on illegal robocallers. Don't press any numbers. The recording might say that pressing a number will let you speak to a live operator or remove you from their call list, but it might lead to more robocalls, instead.

Government Relief Checks

Expect scammers to take advantage of this. Here's what you need to know: The government will not ask you to pay anything up front to get this money. The government will not call to ask for your Social Security number, bank account, or credit card number. Anyone who does is a scammer.

Fake Charities

Do your homework when it comes to donations. Use the organizations listed at ftc.gov/charity to help you research charities. If someone wants donations in cash, by gift card, or by wiring money, don't do it.

Misinformation & Rumors

Before you pass on any messages, do some fact checking by contacting trusted sources. Visit usa.gov/coronavirus for links to federal, state and local government agencies.

Stay informed:

1 Visit:

- ftc.gov/coronavirus
- coronavirus.gov
- usa.gov/coronavirus

2

Report suspicious claims or questionable practices to the FTC at ftc.gov/complaint.

3

Keep up with the latest scams. Sign up for the FTC's Consumer Alerts at ftc.gov/subscribe.

KEEP CALM and Avoid Coronavirus Scams

Here are **5 things** you can do to avoid a Coronavirus scam:



Ignore offers for vaccinations and home test kits.

Scammers are selling products to treat or prevent COVID-19 without proof that they work.



Hang up on robocalls.

Scammers use illegal sales call to get your money and your personal information.



Watch out for phishing emails and text messages.

Don't click on links in emails or texts you didn't expect.



Research before you donate.

Don't let anyone rush you into making a donation. Get tips on donating wisely at [ftc.gov/charity](https://www.ftc.gov/charity).



Stay in the know.

Go to [ftc.gov/coronavirus](https://www.ftc.gov/coronavirus) for the latest information on scams. Sign up to get FTC's alerts at [ftc.gov/subscribe](https://www.ftc.gov/subscribe).





Protect Yourself

AVOID COVID-19 Vaccine Scams

As COVID-19 vaccine distribution begins, here are signs of potential scams:

- You are asked to pay out of pocket to get the vaccine.
- You are asked to pay to put your name on a vaccine waiting list or to get early access.
- Advertisements for vaccines through social media platforms, email, telephone calls, online, or from unsolicited/unknown sources.
- Marketers offering to sell or ship doses of the vaccine for payment.
- ✓ **Protect Yourself. Do not give out your personal information to unknown sources.**

! If you believe you have been the victim of COVID-19 fraud, immediately report it to:

- HHS-OIG Hotline: **1-800-HHS-TIPS** | tips.hhs.gov
- FBI Hotline: **1-800-CALL-FBI** | ic3.gov
- CMS/Medicare Hotline: **1-800-MEDICARE**



For accurate, up-to-date information about COVID-19, visit:

oig.hhs.gov/coronavirus
fbi.gov/coronavirus
justice.gov/coronavirus



HHS
Office of
Inspector
General



Federal
Bureau of
Investigation



Department
of Justice

