

Report to the Tyne and Wear Trading Standards Joint Committee

4 March 2021

Covid-19 Scams

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Purpose of the report

To update the Committee on Covid scams being reported to trading standards.

Summary

1. Scams are the scourge of our communities. They are operated by criminals with the sole purpose of identifying and exploiting often vulnerable, elderly and mentally impaired people. Most scams will be an attempt to steal from you or trick you into revealing personal information
2. As the COVID-19 pandemic has evolved, scammers have developed new scams to meet the new environment we find ourselves in. Scam levels continue to rise and are being widely reported across the UK. Over the course of the pandemic, the physical and mental challenges we have faced can make some of us quite vulnerable. This vulnerability can be an issue when residents are the targets of scammers.

Test and Trace scam

3. Scammers are posing as workers from the NHS Test and Trace service have made calls asking for payment for coronavirus tests. Those being called are told that they have been in contact with someone who has tested positive for Covid-19 and are then told they must purchase a test over the phone. Residents are then asked for their bank details. The cost of the test and results is £500.

NHS email/phone scam

4. Residents across the country have reported being targeted by email fraudsters. The email, which purports to be from the NHS, tells the recipient they have been selected to receive the coronavirus vaccine from the health service. It asks the recipient to click on a link inside the email which is part of a phishing scam. The link then takes you to another website the asks for financial details to pay for the

vaccine. In a similar scam elderly residents have been receiving phone calls advising them the vaccination would be carried out at their home and the caller required their name, address and financial details.

Covid -19 doorstep scams

5. Scammers are calling door to door claiming to be carrying out Coronavirus testing or offering the vaccine to residents. In one extreme case, a man in London knocked on the door of a 92-year-old woman and administered her with a fake vaccine before taking a £160 payment which he told her would be reimbursed by the NHS.

Fake pet sales

6. Trading standards have seen a rise in fake pet sales emerging online through the Covid pandemic. Puppies and kittens are advertised on social media. The fraudsters place an advert of the pet for sale. The scammers are using lockdown as an excuse for prospective purchasers not to visit the puppy or kitten. Once the sale is agreed the purchaser will be asked for an advance payment by bank transfer. However, the pet never materialises.

Fake grants

7. Residents are receiving text messages enticing victims to believe they're receiving a Covid related grant. The text contains a link to a phishing site designed to steal money from the recipient. Victims are led to believe that by clicking the link they can claim a UK government-funded grant for £277.59

Fake mask exemption badges

8. Hundreds of unlawful eBay listings for so-called face mask exemption badges have been removed by trading standards. Trading standards officers worked closely with eBay to remove more than 700 listings.

TV Licence scam

9. Criminals are sending out fake texts to BBC TV licence holders offering a Covid refund payment in an attempt to steal personal and financial information. The text offers a link to an "extremely convincing" fake website where people are asked to input their bank details to claim a refund.

Recommendation

11. The Committee is asked to note the information as contained within the report.

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