The Federal Trade Commission is reporting that Americans have already lost close to $13 million dollars in COVID related scams. Scammers are taking advantage of the current state of affairs and are finding ways to trick people out of their money. Beware of the following types of scams:

- Stimulus Check Scams: We have all heard about the stimulus checks that will be distributed as a result of recent legislation. Scammers are taking the confusion on how this works to dupe citizens. Specifically, calls are being made claiming that bank account information is needed to be given over the phone so
checks can be delivered. Scammers then use the bank account information to take the victim's money. If you have filed taxes in the past two years, the IRS should have information on where your check should go. The government is not calling people on the phone for bank information. The Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA) has recently published a link where victims of IRS scams related to COVID-19 can make a report. [https://www.treasury.gov/tigta/contact.shtml#COVID](https://www.treasury.gov/tigta/contact.shtml#COVID);

- **Product/Treatment Scams:** Certain products, such as toilet paper and hand sanitizer, have been in short supply. Scammers are setting up websites promising delivery of such products. Other websites are advertising home COVID tests. Victims supply their credit card information but no product is ever delivered. Be careful about where you shop online. Use major retailers. And know that there is no approved home COVID tests at this time;

- **Work from Home Scams:** Unemployment has spiked with people needing work. Scammers are taking this opportunity to offer work from home. Money is requested for set up fees for fake businesses. Investigate anyone offering employment to make sure that their company is legitimate;

- **Debt Reduction Scams:** With lack of employment and income, people are worried about how they can continue to pay their debts. Scammers are reaching out offering assistance with the payment of bills for a minimal cost. Once they receive money, they are never heard from again. You are better off using this type of service from an established bank than putting trust in someone reaching out to you online;

- **Sick Family Member Scams:** Scammers are using COVID to claim that they, or their family member, is sick. They then ask for money to assist in medical bills. Make sure, prior to donating to anyone, that their claims check out. Do not give blindly to people who you do not know;

- **Websites Offering "Exclusive COVID" Information:** Everyone wants the most up to date information involving the pandemic. Scammers are marketing websites that have "exclusive" information. Once you enter the site, software downloads on your computer allowing access to your personal information. Make sure you are looking at accredited websites and don't be attracted by "clickbait";
Charity Scams: Everyone wants to help during this tragedy. Americans are known for their charitable nature. In this time of tragedy, make sure you check the credentials of charities that are seeking your money. Use the I.R.S. Tax Exempt Organizational Search Tool to check the validity of charities prior to transfer of money.

IF YOU THINK YOU ARE BEING SCAMMED:

Call the Montgomery County Prosecutor's Consumer Fraud Unit at 937-225-4747 and ask for a Fraud Investigator.

The above ALERT is part of the Montgomery County Prosecuting Attorney's initiative to help citizens become aware of ways they can avoid becoming a victim, or ways they can help stop criminal activity that may be occurring. Upon request, the office can provide presentations on crime prevention actions and activities to halt crime and increase the quality of life in our community.

If you would like additional information on the above ALERT, or would like additional information regarding our programs to assist consumers in general and/or seniors in particular, please contact Kimberly Melnick, Supervising Attorney, Adult Protection Unit, or Anthony Schoen, Supervising Attorney, Fraud and Economic Crimes Unit at 937-225-5757.

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