SCAM ALERT – COVID-19 VACCINE SCAMS

The COVID-19 vaccine is now available to millions, including Caltech employees as of March 1. But with wider availability comes the inevitable spike in vaccine scams.

Fraudsters are promising early access to vaccines or even a personal shipment of vaccines -- at a cost, of course. But these offers aren't legitimate, and those they scam could end up with their personal information exposed and money stolen.

Here are six current scams people are receiving through email, text messages, and unsolicited phone calls.

1. SCAM: You're asked to pay for your vaccine

You won't have to pay to receive the COVID-19 vaccine when it's your turn. If you're asked to pay or provide private information, that's not legit.

You should only receive a COVID-19 vaccine at an authorized vaccination site, such as a hospital, pharmacy or mass vaccination hub. If you're not sure where to find a local vaccination site, you can look them up by state through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

It is possible your vaccine provider will charge you an "administration fee" for giving you the shot. You can be reimbursed for this fee through your insurance or, if you're not insured, through the Health Resources and Services Administration's Provider Relief Fund, per the CDC. If you can't afford the fee, though, you won't be turned away.

2. SCAM: You're offered early access for a fee

If you receive an offer to get your COVID-19 vaccine early for a fee, ignore it. No health department or vaccination site would vaccinate someone ahead of schedule if they paid for it.

3. SCAM: You're told to pay to put your name on a waiting list

As mentioned above, your local health department or vaccination site will not reach out to you and ask for payment to be put on a waiting list.

4. SCAM: You're asked to schedule appointments through unverified platforms

Unless you're certain your local health department is scheduling vaccine appointments on Eventbrite or similar platforms, you should avoid registering through sites unaffiliated with your health department or pharmacy.
Some counties are using Eventbrite to schedule vaccine appointments, but the ambiguity has made it easier for scammers to cash in. In one Florida county where health officials did not use Eventbrite, scammers made fake accounts and charged applicants to make vaccine appointments in the county anyway.

It's best to schedule an appointment through your health department or local pharmacy.

Individuals in Los Angeles County who are eligible can visit the websites below to schedule an appointment:

- California Vaccine Appointments: https://myturn.ca.gov/
- LA County Vaccine Appointments: http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus/vaccine/index.htm

5. SCAM: You're told to pay to have the vaccine shipped to you

Vaccine distributors are not shipping doses of the vaccine to individuals, and you shouldn't administer the vaccine to yourself. You should only receive a vaccine at authorized vaccination sites.

6. SCAM: You're made to take additional tests before you get a vaccine

You won't be made to take an antibody test or COVID-19 test before you receive your vaccine, so if you get texts, calls or emails that claim you should buy a test before you go, that's a scam. You don't need to undergo any additional medical tests before or during your vaccine appointment.

Bottom line: If you're sent communication about vaccines that seems fishy, check it out with your local health department. Don't give out personal information such as your bank account information or Social Security number when solicited by someone you don't know -- no health department or vaccination site would require that information to get you vaccinated. And you should only be vaccinated at authorized vaccination sites.

Remember these three ways to avoid COVID-19 Vaccine scams

You can’t pay to put your name on a list to get the vaccine. That’s a scam.

You can’t pay to get early access to the vaccine. That’s a scam.

Nobody legit will call about the vaccine and ask for your Social Security, bank account, or credit card number. That’s a scam.

Ignore any vaccine offers that say different, or ask for personal or financial information.
Learn more at ftc.gov/coronavirus/scams