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Contact Kylie Mason

Phone 850-245-0150

OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL STATE OF FLORIDA

Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

Avoid COVID-19 Vaccine and Distribution Scams



TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody today issued a Consumer Alert warning Floridians about COVID-19 vaccine product and distribution scams. With coronavirus vaccines potentially nearing approval by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and consumers anxious to achieve immunity, scammers may exploit the situation to rip-off Floridians.

To highlight the potential for vaccine-related fraud, the International Criminal Police Organization issued a global warning revealing that of 3,000 websites associated with online pharmacies suspected of selling illicit medicines and medical devices, more than half contained cyber threats, including phishing and spamming malware.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, “I am extremely encouraged by news of multiple coronavirus vaccines potentially moving toward FDA approval. Once we have an effective immunization, the swift and orderly distribution of the vaccine will be key to getting our state and country back on track. But Floridians must remain on high alert. Scammers may try to exploit the sense of urgency surrounding the distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine to swindle those trying to protect their health. I am asking all Floridians to be on the lookout for vaccine-related scams and report fraud to our office.”

Attorney General Moody released the following tips to help Floridians avoid COVID-19 vaccine-related scams:

- Know that no COVID-19 vaccine has been approved by the FDA as of the time of this Consumer Alert; therefore, any attempt to sell a vaccine right now is not legitimate;
- Do not respond to solicitations about vaccines. Once a vaccine is approved and available to the public, availability will be announced by federal and state government agencies, with clear priority tiers and distribution guidelines;
- Never send money or financial information to anyone offering a COVID-19 vaccine or claiming the ability to expedite the process. Vaccine doses purchased with U.S. taxpayer dollars will be provided at no cost; however, vaccination providers will be able to charge an administration fee. Vaccine providers can get this fee reimbursed by the patient's public or private insurance company or, for uninsured patients, by the Health Resources and Services Administration's Provider Relief Fund; and
- Report suspicious solicitations or COVID-19 vaccine-related advertisements to the Attorney General's Office by calling 1(866) 9NO-SCAM or visiting MyFloridaLegal.com.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is also gearing up for an increase in fraud related to COVID-19 vaccines and treatments. ICE Homeland Security Investigations recently launched Operation Stolen Promise 2.0 to identify and prevent the production, sale and distribution of unapproved or unauthorized COVID-19 products. To view the ICE announcement, click here.

The FDA will host a meeting regarding vaccines and related biological products this Thursday to discuss Emergency Use Authorization of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine. For more on the meeting, click here.

To view the latest alerts and to stay up-to-date on COVID-19 related scams, visit the Attorney General's Consumer Alert webpage by clicking here.

For all the Attorney General's COVID-19 related releases and additional COVID-19 tips and resources, click here.

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The Florida Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division issues Consumer Alerts to inform Floridians of emerging scams, new methods used to commit fraud, increased reports of common scams, or any other deceptive practice. Consumer Alerts are designed to notify Floridians about scams and available refunds in an effort to prevent financial losses or other harm caused by deceptive practices. Anyone encountering a scam should report the incident to the Florida Attorney General's Office by calling 1(866) 9NO-SCAM or visiting MyFloridaLegal.com. To view recent Consumer Alerts and for other information about avoiding scams, visit MyFloridaLegal.com/ConsumerAlert.