

June 2009

Fraud Alert!

The Swine Flu: Phony Products and Misleading Websites Exploit Fears of the Disease

Scammers have gone “hog-wild” in their attempts to take advantage of fears related to the swine flu outbreak. Across the country, scammers have telephoned residents in an attempt to sell “mandatory swine flu kits” and offers to sell protective devices pitched as “pandemic respirators” for hundreds of dollars, which turn out to be paper masks from the grocery store. Emails and websites that tout expensive but worthless products to prevent or cure the disease, including a \$199 “protection pack” that contains nothing more than soap, shampoo and body lotion. In order to gain the victim’s trust, the scam artist falsely claims to be an agent with the Federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

To *inoculate* yourself against swine flu scams:

- Ask your primary care physician or a representative of the Department of Health in your local area if you have questions about symptoms or treatment.
- Hang up on callers who try to sell you “swine flu kits.” No matter how urgent the caller makes it sound. Again, contact your primary care physician with questions or concerns.
- Delete any e-mails related to swine flu. It is especially important not to click on embedded links, no matter how enticing. You can report the sender’s address to spam@uce.gov or call the Pennsylvania Attorney General’s Office.
- Report flu-medicine claims to the Food and Drug Administration. There are only two drugs approved by the FDA for treatment of swine flu - the prescription medications Tamiflu and Relenza - and they should be taken only under the supervision of your doctor. Do not believe phone calls or websites promising “must-have” cures and only purchase medication from a reputable pharmacy.
- Regularly scan your computer with antivirus and antispymware software. If your computer becomes infected because of spam, you can report it to the Internet Crime Complaint Center.

Within days of the first headlines, more than 250 new websites using the term “swine flu” were registered, according to the Better Business Bureau. Since then, F-Secure, which manufactures security software, has found at least 1,344 such sites. **“Scammers read newspapers, watch TV and surf the Internet, and they know that by using a hook from the day’s top headlines, they’ll be able to catch lots of fish,” national BBB spokesman Steve Cox said in a prepared statement.**

If you have any questions about this or other scams, please contact one of the Task Force members below.

BUCKS COUNTY CRIMES AGAINST OLDER ADULTS TASK FORCE

Bucks County District Attorney’s Office

215-348-6344

Bucks County Area Agency on Aging

215-348-0510

Bucks County Coroner’s Office

215-348-3852

Network of Victim Assistance (NOVA)

1-800-675-6900

A Woman’s Place (AWP)

1-800-220-8116

Bucks County Office of Consumer Protection

215-348-6060

Bucks County Register of Wills

215-348-6265

US Dept. of Health and Human Services

Investigations, Office of the Inspector General

www.crimesagainstolderadultsbucks.org

24 - HOUR HOTLINE 1-800-490-8505