

SCAM ALERT! – Pandemic Tracers!

Officials in Pennsylvania are warning of the latest coronavirus pandemic problem: contact tracing scams.

Contact tracing is the process of identifying people who have come into contact with someone who has tested positive for the COVID-19 virus so they can quarantine and monitor for symptoms.

But in Pennsylvania, officials say scammers are attempting to take advantage of how this process works by posing as contact tracers in attempt to get personal information.

Scams might include a caller asking for someone's Social Security number or payment for tracing services — neither of which is ever a component of a contact tracing inquiry, officials said.

"Contact tracing is vital in the state's efforts to stop the spread of COVID-19, and we want Pennsylvanians to be confident that if they receive a call from a contact-tracer that the call is legitimate," Secretary of Health Rachel Levine said.

Pennsylvania has a goal that within 24 hours of receiving the positive result reported into the National Electronic Disease Surveillance System, its trained public health staff will conduct an interview for a case investigation. The person with the newly confirmed COVID-19 infection is first contacted to obtain a list of close contacts they had while infectious.

Then contact tracers reach out to those close contacts to "educate, inform and offer support." After an initial phone call, the contact tracer may follow up with more calls, or may text or email.

Here are some examples of questions a contact tracer may ask:

- Verification of your date of birth, address and any other phone numbers you may have.
- If you have already tested positive for COVID-19, they may also ask for the date and location of where you were tested.

A contact tracer will NOT ask for:

- Your Social Security number, financial or bank account information, or personal details unrelated to your potential exposure to someone with COVID-19.
- Personal information through SMS/text message or send you to any website link asking for personal information.
- Photographs or videos of any kind.
- Passwords.
- Money or a payment.

Older adults are at particular risk of being victims of this insidious type of scam, said Pennsylvania Secretary of Aging Robert Torres.

"Scammers prefer to prey on individuals who may be more trusting, are alone, or may respond out of confusion or fear," Torres said. "COVID-19 has isolated many older adults from family and other supports. Therefore, it's understandable that an older adult, hearing that they may have been exposed, would want to cooperate with any effort to protect themselves or a loved one. However, it's important that they stay alert about any contact from anyone identifying themselves as a contact tracer and do not provide personal information until they are sure the individual and information are legitimate."

If you are contacted by a tracer and unsure if they're authentic, call the Pennsylvania Department of Health at 877-PA HEALTH (877-724-3258) to verify.