

Scamming complaints on the rise as virus continues to spread

The following message was issued by Buckinghamshire Council on 26 March

Doorstep scammers are taking advantage of the coronavirus emergency to con elderly and vulnerable people.

There has been a rise in the number of scam complaints related to the coronavirus outbreak, according to Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards team, who are urging members of the public to be aware. Since the beginning of the month the total number of scam complaints has increased by 40%.

Latest complaints include reports of a South Buckinghamshire woman in her 80s who answered the door to a man who tried to demand £220 in cash to complete a health and safety check. Additionally, there have been widespread complaints of scammers trying to take people's bank details to cover payments for school meals whilst the schools are closed.

Residents are also being urged to be especially wary of people offering or selling:

- Virus testing kits – these are only offered by the NHS.
- Vaccines or miracle cures – there is currently no vaccine or cure.
- Shopping or medication collection services that require payment upfront.
- Home cleaning services.
- Overpriced or counterfeit products.

Residents must also be wary of emails, texts, telephone calls and messages via social media from scammers offering refunds on taxes or bills, as these are highly prevalent.

Trading Standards have provided some helpful tips to help prevent people from becoming victims of scams:

- Don't be pressurised into making a decision. If someone is trying to rush you or panic you, they are probably trying to scam you.
- Only purchase goods from trusted retailers.
- Be suspicious of requests for money upfront.
- Do not give your bank card or bank details to a stranger. Never write your PIN number down.
- Know who you're dealing with – if you don't know the person who's offering you help then ask to be introduced by someone that you know and trust.

Gareth Williams, Buckinghamshire County Council's Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Health, said: "I am absolutely appalled that anyone would use a time of national emergency to target vulnerable and older people. This is as low as you can get.

I'm heartened by the fantastic number of people locally who want to help others, and I'd encourage anyone looking out for their elderly and vulnerable neighbours to keep an eye and ear out for these types of scammers."

If you have information or are worried about coronavirus related scams please contact Trading Standards. You can email trading_standards@bucksandsurreytradingstandards.gov.uk or call on 01296 388788.