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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Beware of COVID-19 Scams

Scammers are now using the COVID-19 pandemic to swindle money and information from unsuspecting victims. One of the more recent types of scams are contact tracing scams. These scams often appear in the form of text messages or phone calls seeking money, Social Security, bank account, or credit card numbers, along with other sensitive information not required for authentic contact tracing. Scammers can try to take advantage of contact tracing efforts in several ways. Some could offer fake tracing jobs to try to get someone to pay fees or hand over their Social Security number. Others could send emails or texts with links to malicious websites that could take over someone's phone or computer.

If a someone claiming to be a contact tracer asks for any type of personal financial information, hang up or do not respond. A legitimate contact tracer affiliated with a Public Health Department or from the North Carolina Department of Health & Human Services (NCDHHS) will never ask for your Social Security Number, bank or credit card numbers, or any other financial information at any time.

Legitimate contact tracers will ask about your medical symptoms and about anyone with whom you've had any close contact with. Contract tracing is an important tool used to help curb the spread of the virus. It helps local public health departments track down people who may have been exposed to the coronavirus and allows them to then take proper precautions.

"Contact tracing is a real effort that is happening currently, and you may receive a call, email, text, or a visit from a contact tracer, " said Robert Wittmann, Director of the Moore County Health Department. "You should be cooperative and speak with them but hang up or end the interaction if they ask you for money, any account information, your Social Security number, or to click on a link, as those are sure signs of a scam."

Individuals being contacted regarding contact tracing will get an initial text from the number **45394** or email from NC-ARIAS-NoReply@dhhs.nc.gov with follow-up phone calls from the Health Department or **NC OUTREACH (844-628-7223).**

"To Protect and Promote Health through Prevention and Control of Disease and Injury."
http://www.moorecountync.gov/health/

Environmental Health
Telephone: 910-947-6283
Fax: 910-947-5127

WIC
Telephone: 910-947-3271
Fax: 910-947-2460

For a sample scenario of what real contact tracing looks like when a person tests positive for COVID-19, click here: https://files.nc.gov/covid/documents/about/tracing/Contact-Tracing-Flowchart.pdf

The following tips from the Department of Justice can help protect individuals and businesses from being victimized by COVID-19 scams:

- Independently verify the identity of any company, charity, or individual that contacts you regarding COVID-19.

- Check the websites and email addresses offering information, products, or services related to COVID-19. Be aware that scammers often employ addresses that differ only slightly from those belonging to the entities they are impersonating. For example, they might use "cdc.com" or "cdc.org" instead of "cdc.gov."

- Be wary of unsolicited emails offering information, supplies, or treatment for COVID-19 or requesting your personal information for medical purposes. Legitimate health authorities will not contact the public this way.

- Do not click on links or open email attachments from unknown or unverified sources. Doing so could download a virus onto your computer or device.

- Make sure the anti-malware and anti-virus software on your computer is operating and up to date. Keep your operating system up to date as well.

- Ignore offers for a COVID-19 vaccine, cure, or treatment. Remember, if a vaccine becomes available, you will not hear about it for the first time through an email, online ad, or unsolicited sales pitch.

- Check online reviews of any company offering COVID-19 products or supplies. Avoid companies whose customers have complained about not receiving items.

- Research any charities or crowdfunding sites soliciting donations in connection with COVID-19 before giving any donation. Remember, an organization may not be legitimate even if it uses words like "CDC" or "government" in its name or has reputable looking seals or logos on its materials. For online resources on donating wisely, visit the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) website at www.ftc.gov.

- Be wary of any business, charity, or individual requesting payments or donations in cash, by wire transfer, gift card, or through the mail. Do not send money through any of these channels.

If you think you are a victim of a fraud or attempted fraud involving COVID-19, call the National Center for Disaster Fraud Hotline at 1-866-720-5721 or email at disaster@leo.gov. If it is a cyber scam, submit your complaint through https://www.ic3.gov.

Moore County's Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard can be found here: https://moorecounty.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/4c11e5bf79b64a6e9c8377d5129cc97c

For more information about coronavirus and Moore County's response, please visit www.moorecountync.gov/health, find us on Facebook (Moore County Health Department), and follow us on Twitter (@mocohealth).

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