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Hawai'i Department of Health warns public about COVID-19 scams

HONOLULU – There has been an alarming increase in various types of COVID-19 scams across the nation, and kūpuna and other Hawai'i residents are not exempt from being targeted as potential victims.

The Hawai'i Department of Health, in collaboration with the Department of the Attorney General, Executive Office on Aging's Senior Medicare Patrol Hawaii (SMP), and the Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs, is alerting Hawai'i residents about new COVID-19 vaccination scams.

Scammers usually send phone and text messages demanding individuals to call back to receive a COVID-19 vaccination in exchange for money. Callers may falsely claim the vaccine will be available only for three months for \$1,000, a limited time to create a false sense of urgency, as in a recent case involving a call from Jamaica to a Hawai'i resident.

"All COVID-19 vaccinations are free. At no time should anyone pay for the vaccine," said Dr. Elizabeth Char, director of the Hawai'i Department of Health. "Everyone, including kūpuna, will eventually have an opportunity to receive their vaccine."

"As scammers accelerate their work to victimize individuals with seemingly legitimate offers, we're urging residents to remain vigilant," added Norma Kop, director of SMP Hawaii, which assist beneficiaries, their families and caregivers to prevent, detect and report healthcare fraud, errors and abuse. "We encourage residents to refrain from responding to communication from an unknown number, email or unfamiliar location to protect themselves from bogus COVID-19 vaccine offers, especially those asking to verify one's personal information, such as Medicare or Medicaid numbers, to receive healthcare benefits."

SMP Hawaii offers these tips:

- No one can pay to "jump ahead of the line" and receive earlier access to a vaccination.
- No one who calls from the Hawai'i State Department of Health or its trusted partners concerning the COVID-19 vaccination will ask you for a Social Security, bank account, credit card number or related personal information.

- Legitimate authorities do not ask for payment in exchange for the vaccine – just hang up.

Hawai'i residents should always safeguard their personal information, healthcare related numbers, financial information and related identifiers. To voice a concern or to file a complaint, contact SMP Hawaii at info@smphawaii.org or 808-586-7281. Neighbor island residents may call toll free at 1-800-296-9422. To learn more about ways to prevent, detect and report healthcare fraud, errors and abuse, or to volunteer, visit www.smphawaii.org.

For the latest information on COVID-19 vaccinations, please visit HawaiiCOVID19.com.

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