



PENNSYLVANIA STATE POLICE COMMUNITY AWARENESS BULLETIN

CAB 001-2021

March 12, 2021

COUNTERFEIT CORONAVIRUS VACCINE SCAMS

The Pennsylvania State Police (PSP) reminds Pennsylvania residents of the potential physical health risks and financial harms of purchasing, administering, and consuming counterfeit COVID-19 vaccines. Unverified vaccines made from unknown substances under unknown conditions present significant health risks. Additionally, consumers of fake vaccines, believing they are subsequently protected against COVID-19, may make lifestyle choices that increase their actual risk of COVID-19 infection. Residents should remain cautious of websites and stores selling products that claim to prevent, treat, or cure COVID-19.

Scammers have targeted the vaccine distribution process, promoting the sale of counterfeit vaccines since the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued the first COVID-19 vaccine emergency use authorizations in mid-December 2020. Scammers capitalizing on high public demand, nationwide shortages in vaccine availability, and widespread consumer confusion over decentralized processes, are using fraud methods ranging from fake websites purporting to sell vaccines in order to steal personally identifiable information, to individuals shipping and administering fake vaccines to victims.

- In January 2021, a [Washington](#) man was arrested for online postings made as early as March 2, 2020, claiming to have a COVID-19 vaccine and offering to inject customers for \$400-\$1,000 each.
- In February 2021, three [Maryland](#) residents were arrested for an online fraud scheme purporting to sell COVID-19 vaccines. The fraudulent website mirrored that of a legitimate biotechnology company whose COVID-19 vaccine has received FDA emergency use authorization.
- In March 2021, [Interpol](#) announced the disruption of a fake COVID-19 vaccine distribution network. At least 2,400 doses had been smuggled across continents from China to South Africa.



Police in South Africa seized hundreds of fake COVID-19 vaccines and made several arrests following a global alert issued by INTERPOL.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Seek and consult reliable sources for the most up-to-date and accurate information about COVID-19 and vaccines, including the [FDA](#), [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), and the [Pennsylvania Department of Health](#).
- Always consult with a licensed medical professional to obtain a COVID-19 vaccine or treatment.
- Do not purchase COVID-19 vaccines and treatments over the Internet.
- Do not purchase COVID-19 vaccines and treatments through an online pharmacy.
- Ignore unsolicited offers for vaccinations and miracle treatments or cures.
- Be wary of advertisements for vaccines and treatments on social media.
- Report any suspicious activity involving COVID-19 vaccines and treatments to COVID19FRAUD@dhs.gov.
- The free *See Something, Send Something* smartphone application enables individuals to report suspicious activity by capturing a photograph, screenshot, and other information to send it directly to the Pennsylvania State Police. Tips may also be sent to tips@pa.gov.



The PSP is not aware of any instances of counterfeit vaccines occurring in Pennsylvania; however, the department reminds residents who fall victim to a scam to report it to their local police department.