



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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COVID-19 Contact Tracing Phone Scams

Crow Wing County Public Health is advising residents to be aware of contact tracing phone scams. The process of identifying people who have come in contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, is known as “Contact Tracing” and is being exploited by criminals in their scam campaigns. Contact tracers in Crow Wing County are coordinated by the Crow Wing County Public Health Team and the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH). Contact Tracers work with an infected person to gather data associated with the virus and find out about others that infected person came in close contact with.

On May 19th, the Federal Trade Commission began warning the public of scammers attempting to steal information from people by pretending to be Contact Tracers. The scam campaigns involved phone calls from scammers claiming to be Contact Tracers, and spam text and email messages asking people to click on links which takes them to malicious sites or downloads malicious software onto devices.

So far the FTC has not yet detected any malicious contact tracing impersonation scams in Minnesota, however there are reports from other states that have seen significant impact. On May 20th, New Jersey officials warned residents that thousands of contact tracing scams have been reported in their state.

If a legitimate Contact Tracer does contact you they will not ask you for information like your social security number, bank account or credit card number. If someone claiming to be a contact tracer prompts you for this information it is likely a scam.

“Contact tracing is a very important step in slowing the spread of COVID-19,” said Crow Wing County Public Health Supervisor Michelle Moritz. “It is crucial to alert the public if they may have come in contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19. Residents should be aware of this scam but more importantly to be aware of the efforts of our local public health team as we continue to reach out to those in our communities.”

Crow Wing County Contact Tracers will be contacting you by phone initially and will not be sending out electronic messages to first alert you of possibly being in contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19. If you are you are called and unsure about the contact tracing questions you are advised to get the phone number and call the individual back.

What You Can Do

Filter unwanted text messages

- Check if your phone has an option to filter and block messages from unknown senders of spam
- Wireless provider may have a tool or service that lets you block text messages

Additional steps you can take to protect yourself

Our Vision: Being Minnesota's favorite place.

Our Mission: Serve well. Deliver value. Drive results.

Our Values: Be responsible. Treat people right. Build a better future.

- Protect your online accounts by using Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA)
- Regularly update your OS on your electronic devices and apply security updates
- Back up the data on your device regularly to prevent valuable data loss

<https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/blog/2020/05/covid-19-contact-tracing-text-message-scams>

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