

The Latest COVID19 Scam Involves Contact Tracing

July 10, 2020 - If you're following news about COVID19 - and who isn't, these days - then you've probably heard something about "contact tracing." Contact tracing is the process used by health agencies to track and notify people that they may have been exposed to the disease and that they need to self-isolate for the next two weeks. Most contact tracers are state or local government employees. And legitimate contact tracers won't ask you to provide highly personal information such as your SSN, but scam artists running contact tracing cons will.

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(function() {
var s = document.createElement('SCRIPT'), s1 = document.getElementsByTagName('SCRIPT')[0];
s.type = 'text/javascript';
s.src = 'http://widgets.digg.com/buttons.js';
s1.parentNode.insertBefore(s, s1);
})();
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(function() {
var po = document.createElement('script'); po.type = 'text/javascript'; po.async = true;
po.src = 'https://apis.google.com/js/plusone.js';
var s = document.getElementsByTagName('script')[0]; s.parentNode.insertBefore(po, s);
})();
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Legitimate contact tracers will normally try to notify people of exposure via the phone. In many cases, phone calls will be preceded by a text message telling the recipient they will be receiving a call and what number that call will come from. The reason for this is that contact tracers don't want you screening the call or blocking their number.

But some contact tracing scams begin with a text message that contains a link in it. Clicking on the link is a big mistake because it will likely install malware on the device you are using. That malware will steal login credentials for your financial accounts if they are stored on your device, and even if you don't store that information, may contain key-loggers that will steal this information the next time your log into a financial account. In short, you'll become a victim of identity theft.

Even if you don't receive a text, you may get a phone call claiming to be from a contact tracer. Calls like this, whether legitimate or not, can be very upsetting. Nobody wants to hear that they have been exposed to a disease or that they need to be quarantined. The fact that you are upset actually makes you more vulnerable to scams though. You may not be thinking clearly right after you receive this news, and scam artists know this. There are a lot of people who will probably answer any questions they are asked from that point on in the call. Again, that's a big mistake.

As previously noted, legitimate contact tracers won't ask for personal information. They don't need your SSN, bank account numbers or anything else like that. And they don't take payments for their services so they don't need your credit card information. If they start requesting this kind of information, you are being scammed and it is time to hang up.

As with all scams, the people behind them are looking for the most vulnerable victims they can find. COVID19 has presented them with a golden opportunity. Millions of scared people translate to millions of potential victims. But with a little knowledge, you can avoid becoming one of their statistics.

by Jim Malmberg

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