



Business Bureau Senior Awareness Initiative

Beware scam companies while purchasing PPE online

While things change day by day, one constant that doesn't look like it will be going away anytime soon is the need for personal protective equipment (PPE). The CDC provides guidelines for effective masks against coronavirus exposure and spread; however, many companies and individuals sell PPE that do not meet CDC standards or simply never send any items at all once ordered.

Customs officials seized 500,000 fake N95 masks at O'Hare International Airport recently. The shipment was en route from China to New Jersey; its destination is unclear. Once the shipment was seized, masks were sent to a U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention office in West Virginia for testing. The masks were determined to have a filter efficiency level beneath 95%, the CDC mandated guideline. The remaining masks were sent to the Department of Homeland Security for testing. The total amount of counterfeit masks equaled roughly \$3 million due to the high demand for N95 masks.

As you prepare to buy face masks, BBB Serving Greater Cleveland offers these tips:

Homemade Masks are an Option. The CDC has directions on how to make homemade face masks on their website. Some of these DIY instructions also include "no sew" masks made from t-shirts. Wearing facial coverings such as bandanas, scarfs, and handkerchiefs also help prevent person-to-person transmission of disease.

Only buy from reputable stores and websites. The best way to avoid getting scammed is to buy them directly from a seller you know and trust. Check BBB.org to see what other consumers' experiences have been.

Be sure the online store has working contact info. Before offering up your name, address, and credit card information, make sure the company is legitimate. A real street address, a working customer service number, a positive BBB Business Profile... these are just a few of the things to be looking out for to determine if a company is legitimate.

Be Wary of Stock Photos. BBB has identified many suspected scam websites reusing the same stock photos. Use websites like tineye.com and Google Image search to reverse search images online. If the same picture is used across multiple websites, be skeptical.

Pay by Credit Card. Using your credit card provides protection if the order is not received.



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Refunds totaling more than \$76,000 sent to consumers who bought “miracle” pain cure for older adults

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) announced that they are sending 4,782 checks totaling \$76,368.54 to consumers who bought Isoprex, marketed as a “miracle cure” to older Americans across the country. The company, named Renaissance Health Publishing, LLC and its owner, James DiGeorgia, advertised the products through mailed brochures and websites.

Isoprex is a pill comprised mainly of herbs and spices. Renaissance Health Publishing claimed that the pill could provide relief for muscle and joint pain, arthritis, headaches, and a multitude of other ailments. The company and advertisers also said that they had tests and studies to substantiate their medical claims, which was untrue. Renaissance Health Publishing also claimed that testimonials and ads were genuinely endorsed. However, most of the testimonials came from current Isoprex employees or individuals who were compensated for their reviews.

BBB Serving Greater Cleveland wants to warn area residents about “miracle” cure scams that make the rounds, particularly at the beginning of the year. Look out for fake cures, phony prevention measures and other scams. Keep the following tips in mind:

Be savvy about product claims. Be sure to evaluate claims of any medical product before buying. Especially watch out for products claiming to offer a “miracle cure” for a range of ailments.

Only buy from reputable stores and websites. The best way to avoid getting scammed is to purchase products directly from a seller you know and trust. Check BBB.org to read what other consumers’ experiences have been.

Be sure the online store has working contact information. If a company seems legitimate but you aren’t familiar with it, be extra careful with your personal information. Before offering up your name, address, and credit card information, make sure the company is legitimate such as if the business has a real street address, a working customer service number and a positive BBB Business Profile. These are just a few of the things to be looking out for to determine if a company is legitimate.



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Beware of tax scams going into the 2021 tax season

BBB Serving Greater Cleveland is warning area residents to beware tax scams as we near tax day on April 15th, 2021. In IRS scams, fraudsters will pose as an official either arresting or auditing you for withheld funds; scammers will also pose as friends offering a new opportunity at untapped tax refunds. In both of these methods, victims will be swindled out of giving their personal information or money to get out of trouble or access the refund.

One local consumer in Brook Park, Ohio recently reported being targeted by a tax scam. The consumer said that "I received a text from someone I met online a while ago but never actually met." As the victim messaged with their "friend," they informed the victim that they could access "tax refund monies" by contacting "Barry Baker at 906-767-0725." The victim eventually contacted Baker at the number, ensuing in back and forth messages which culminated with, "eventually asking me for a copy of my drivers license. That's when I contacted BBB."

To protect you and your loved ones against IRS scams and fraudsters posing as friends, BBB Cleveland has these tips:

Don't assume an offer in a message from a Facebook friend is legitimate. Call or talk to them in person to verify if they contacted you.

Remember, government agencies do not communicate through social media avenues like Facebook. So, be wary of unsolicited messages.

Ask About Payment Method. Remember, gift cards are for gifts. Government or other agency officials will never call and demand payment in gift cards. The IRS also states on its website that they do not accept payment via wire transfer or prepaid debit card.

Know the policy. The IRS always mails a bill and then follows up with a phone call, and they'll never demand immediate payment over the phone. Similarly, the IRS doesn't threaten to involve local law enforcement, and the IRS cannot revoke your driver's or business licenses or immigration status.

Don't trust your caller ID. The internet has made it possible for scammers to use fake IDs when they call your home. If you receive a suspicious call, don't make any important decisions based on what your caller ID says. Avoid answering calls from phone numbers you don't recognize, even if they appear to be local. If it's important, the caller will leave a message.