

Financial phonies

More on Coronavirus

With most Americans getting [stimulus checks](#) under the federal CARES Act and tens of millions of people [newly unemployed](#), federal agencies are warning of a [wave of schemes](#) to steal government payments. A May survey of jobless Americans by Credit Karma found that more than 1 in 5 had been contacted by scammers about stimulus payments or unemployment benefits.

Watch out for calls or emails, purportedly from government agencies, that use the term "stimulus" (the official term is "economic-impact payment") and ask you to sign over a check or provide personal information like your Social Security number. With economic anxiety rising, crooks are also impersonating banks and lenders, offering bogus help with bills, [credit card debt](#) or student loan forgiveness.

Small businesses are being targeted, too. Scammers seek to siphon [Paycheck Protection Program](#) dollars earmarked to help smaller firms survive the pandemic, or reach out to owners with promises of quick capital or help with Google search results.

The outbreak has also spawned [stock scams](#). The U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission is warning investors about fraudsters touting investments in companies with products that supposedly can prevent, detect or cure COVID-19. Buy those stocks now, they say, and they will soar in price.

It's a classic [penny-stock fraud](#) called "pump and dump." The con artists have already bought the stocks, typically for a dollar or less. As the hype grows and the stock price increases, they dump the stock, saddling other investors with big losses.

Courtesy of AARP.com