

AG Kaul: Warns of, outlines how to identify contact tracing scammers

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MADISON, Wis. – Wisconsin Attorney General Josh Kaul is warning residents about potential scammers using critical contact tracing to steal personal information from unsuspecting Wisconsinites.

“Contact tracing is a key part of the effort to reduce transmission of the coronavirus, but it’s important to know that scammers may try to pose as contact tracers,” said AG Kaul. “Before giving anyone information for contact tracing, please make sure they are a legitimate contact tracer and not someone trying to commit identity theft.”

Contact tracing identifies people who have recently been in close contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, which helps states more rapidly identify those who may have been exposed and quickly get them the necessary support and resources to protect themselves and their loved ones.

“Contact tracing is one of our best tools to identify where COVID-19 is and stop its spread. It’s unconscionable that some are trying to take advantage of Wisconsinites during this pandemic,” said Wisconsin Department of Health Services Secretary-designee Andrea Palm. “However, knowing what questions our contact tracers will and won’t ask can give you the peace of mind that it’s really us on the line. Please do not ever give your Social Security number, bank account or credit card information to someone purporting to be a contact tracer.”

Contact tracers in Wisconsin are hired by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) and local health departments to track the transmission of COVID-19 in Wisconsin. DHS staff assist local health departments in meeting the demand for contact tracers.

“Wisconsin’s contact tracers have been working hard to track the spread of the novel coronavirus to protect our communities,” said Secretary-designee Randy Romanski of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. “Unfortunately, scammers are also working hard to get consumers’ personal information. DATCP’s Consumer Protection Hotline is here to help with resources, tips, or to help you file a complaint if you’ve been the victim of a scam.”

Contact tracers authorized to work in Wisconsin will contact a resident by telephone and identify themselves with a first and last name, and the name of the government entity they are calling from, generally DHS or a local health department.

Contact tracers will say they are contacting you about an urgent public health matter and would like to speak with you to provide further information and share guidance. Legitimate contact tracers will first inform you that you may have been in contact with an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19. They may then ask for information such as:

- How you are feeling,
- Where you went and who you’ve been in contact with in the last few weeks,
- Contact information for those you’ve been in contact with recently,
- Your occupation and work status,
- Contact information and contact preferences.

To identify a scammer, below are some tips.

- Authorized contact tracers will **not** ask for money or for personal information like your Social Security, bank account, or credit card number.
- An authorized contact tracer will not disclose the identity of the person who tested positive and is the starting place for that tracing effort.
- A legitimate contact tracer should be able to immediately provide you with up-to-date testing locations, with addresses, phone numbers, and information about whether you need to make an appointment at a particular location and what you will need to bring to that visit.

Scammers pretending to be contact tracers may also send text or email messages asking residents to click a link, which are “phishing” scams that help a scammer to gain access to a person’s computer, your financial information, and/or personal information. If you receive a communication that you’re unsure about, visit <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/lh-depts/counties.htm> to contact the department or agency.

If you have been contacted by someone you think was not a legitimate contact tracer, please alert the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection: DATCPHotline@Wisconsin.gov or (800) 422-7128.

<https://www.doj.state.wi.us/news-releases/ag-kaul-warns--outlines-how-identify-contact-tracing-scammers>