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How to Protect yourself from COVID-19 Scams

April 21, 2020 (LINCOLN, NEB.) —The Nebraska Department of Banking and Finance (NDBF) is warning investors to be on the lookout for schemes specifically tied to the threat of COVID-19.

NDBF provides the following guidance and tips to avoid schemes seeking to take advantage of unsuspecting consumers and investors.

- **Ask questions and research the investment and person offering it.** Investors should always ask if the salesperson and the investment itself are properly licensed or registered. This information can be confirmed by NDBF. Investors also can check the [SEC's Investment Adviser Public Disclosure](#) database or [FINRA's BrokerCheck](#). Avoid doing business with anyone who is not properly licensed.
- **Don't fall for phishing scams.** Phishing scams may be committed by foreign or domestic parties claiming an association with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or the World Health Organization, or by individuals claiming to offer new or expert medical advice or services. Con artists offering "opportunities" in research and development are scamming you. Scams may even be perpetrated by persons impersonating government personnel, spoofing their email addresses, and encouraging their audience to click links or access malicious attachments. These emails may look real, but any unsolicited emails that have attachments and web links can point to dangerous websites and malicious attachments that can steal information from your computer, lock it up for ransom, or steal your identity. Don't do it.
- **There are no miracle cures.** Scientists and medical professionals have yet to discover a medical breakthrough or develop a vaccine or means to cure COVID-19. Not surprisingly, COVID-19 vaccines sold by online pharmacies are not real. You should not send money or make payments over the phone to anyone claiming they can prevent COVID-19, have a vaccine, or other preventive medicine.
- **Avoid fraudulent charity schemes.** White-collar criminals may pose as charities soliciting money for those affected by COVID-19. Before donating, you should independently verify any charity that is raising money for the sick or secure donations to help uninsured persons pay for medical treatment. You should also avoid online solicitations for cash and gift cards, as these

schemes have become a popular way for scammers to steal money. Think with your head and not with your heart. If you want to donate to a cause, you should work with a legitimate, established organization.

- **Be wary of schemes tied to government assistance or economic relief.** The federal government is sending checks to the public as part of an economic stimulus effort. It will not, however, require the prepayment of fees, taxes on the income, the advance payment of a processing fee, or any other type of charge. Anyone who demands prepayment will almost certainly steal your money. Don't give out or verify any personal information either. Government officials already have your information. No federal or state government agency will call you and ask for personal information.

If it is too good to be true, it probably is. Take the time to investigate any investment pitch and talk with a registered financial professional.

More information about the laws governing the securities industry in Nebraska can be found on NDBF's website at ndbf.nebraska.gov. If you have questions about any investment matter, call NDBF's Consumer Hotline toll free at (877) 471-3445 in Nebraska, or (402) 471-3445 if you are out of state.

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