

## **Residents warned to be vigilant against COVID-19 scams**

**Devon, Somerset and Torbay Trading Standards Service has issued a warning to local residents and businesses to be aware of fraudsters who are trying to exploit fear and uncertainty surrounding COVID-19.**

The outbreak of coronavirus has seen an increase in scams that include counterfeit medical kits that claim to prevent or cure the disease and fake online coronavirus resources which can contain damaging software.

Counterfeit goods such as hand sanitiser, face masks and swabbing kits are also being widely advertised online.

Financial scams, both online and by telephone, have also increased as criminals seek to take advantage of the financial uncertainty many people and businesses face due to the coronavirus.

These include calls pretending to be from your bank or mortgage provider and an increase in loan shark activity.

Devon, Somerset and Torbay Trading Standards are urging people to remain vigilant and to watch out for scams in their neighbourhood, which often target elderly and vulnerable people within the community.

Communities are also being urged to look out for doorstep traders. Whilst there are many genuine community groups and charities that are helping those who are most isolated, it is important to be aware of those who may be taking money under the false pretence of helping with day-to-day tasks.

A full list of identified scams can be viewed on the [National Trading Standards website](#).

**Ben Newell, Trading Standards Manager, Devon, Somerset and Torbay Trading Standards said:** “Try and use people you can trust such as friends or neighbours in the first instance. If you receive an offer of help from elsewhere, ask for a form of identification and always question paying any money upfront. Never to give out personal or financial information (such as bank account details or your PIN) to anyone. This also applies over the phone, even if the caller claims to be from your bank. Scammers will try to rush you into providing your personal details. They may say they have time-limited offer or claim that your bank account is at risk if you don't give them the information they need right away. If you're unsure whether the caller is

genuine, it is a good idea to ring the company or bank they claim to be from. Make sure you find the number yourself and don't use the one provided by the caller.

We are calling on communities to look out for each other. If you see or hear anything suspicious contact the Citizens Advice Consumer Service on 0808 223 1133 or [via the webform on their website](#).”