



PRESS RELEASE

Attorney General Frosh Warns Marylanders About DNA Testing Scam Targeting Medicare and Medicaid Beneficiaries

BALTIMORE, MD (May 8, 2019) – Maryland Attorney General Brian E. Frosh is warning consumers to be suspicious of representatives of companies that purport to offer "free" DNA testing to check for cancer. The DNA testing scam is a new twist used by scammers to trick people into giving away their health insurance information for the purpose of committing identity theft and fraud.

Scammers are targeting Medicare beneficiaries with phone calls and by visiting health fairs, assisted living homes, and senior events. Claiming the DNA testing is covered by Medicare, they will use a cotton swab stick to take a saliva sample from the inside of your mouth. They request your Medicare information and may also ask for your social security number. Do not be fooled; this is a scam. *Medicare only pays for certain genetic testing and cancer screenings that are medically necessary and ordered by a doctor.*

In other states, scammers have also targeted Medicaid beneficiaries by claiming to be affiliated with a local Medicaid insurer. In Louisville, Kentucky, scammers paid \$20 to Medicaid recipients as an incentive for them to take a DNA test, and subsequently requested their Medicaid insurance information. It is illegal to pay anyone who is a recipient of government health insurance to induce them to receive a medical service.

Although the Maryland Office of Attorney General has received a small number of complaints, other states across the country have received numerous complaints about the DNA testing scam, which may be the work of an organized group or individuals acting alone.

The scam raises concerns about potential health care fraud and identity theft since scammers have the names of consumers and their health insurance information. This information could be sold to unscrupulous health care providers who may bill Medicare and Medicaid for medical services that were not provided to the consumer. It could also be used by an imposter to obtain free medical care using your identity and health insurance information.

It is unclear if the genetic samples or test results are being misused or sold for other illicit purposes. Authorities in other states have found evidence of cheek swabs being discarded rather than sent away for actual genetic testing at health fairs.

“These scammers prey on vulnerable individuals, exploiting them for profit and potentially to steal their identities,” said Attorney General Frosh. “I encourage anyone who has been a victim of this ‘DNA’ scam or seen it carried out within their community to immediately report it to our Health Education and Advocacy Unit by calling 410-528-1840 or toll-free at 1-877-261-8807.”

Here are some additional tips on how to protect yourself against the DNA testing scam:

- Be suspicious of anyone offering free DNA tests and cancer screenings. Only a doctor can determine if such testing is medically necessary for you. Be suspicious of anyone offering to pay you to take a DNA test; it is against the law for Medicare or Medicaid beneficiaries to receive payment in exchange for undergoing medical tests.
- Never share your Medicare or Medicaid insurance number (or Social Security Number) with anyone who offers free medical products or medical services.
- Monitor your credit reports for unauthorized activity and your Medicare statements for suspicious charges, especially if you have shared your personal medical information with anyone offering a free DNA test.
- Call 1-800-Medicare (1-800-633-4227) or 1-800-HHS-TIPS if you think you have been the victim of Medicare fraud. Contact the Maryland Department of Health’s Program Integrity Division at 1-866-770-7175 if you believe you have been the victim of Medicaid fraud.