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# PRESS RELEASE

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## Attorney General Brown Offers Tips for Consumers to Shop Secure This Holiday Season

**BALTIMORE, MD (November 27, 2024)** - As Black Friday, Small Business Saturday, and Cyber Monday approach this holiday weekend, Attorney General Anthony G. Brown is urging consumers to remain vigilant and steer clear of common holiday shopping scams. With fake websites designed to steal personal information and misleading online ads, the risk of fraud increases during this busy holiday shopping season.

“Year-end sales are wonderful opportunities to save money on gifts for your loved ones. But don’t let a great deal distract you from the warning signs of a scam,” said **Attorney General Brown**. “Don’t risk your money, peace of mind, or personal information if a holiday sale seems too good to be true.”

Scams are especially prevalent online. Although online shopping offers a convenient and accessible way to get holiday shopping done, consumers should be wary of scams, fraudulent products, and malware – software specifically designed to gain unauthorized access to computer systems.

To help consumers avoid falling victim to these holiday shopping traps, Attorney General Brown released the following tips:

**Research the retailer.** Check online reviews to see if the retailer has a good reputation and satisfied customers. Is there an easy way to contact customer service if you have any problems? If not, you may want to consider another retailer.

**Keep your payment information secure.** Be sure to directly type the retailer’s web address into your browser. Just conducting a web search for a company that you’re interested in may send you to a fake or look-alike website. You should never send personal information or payments through a website if the address does not begin with “https”— the “s” at the end means that your confidential information is secure.

**Be wary about clicking advertisements.** Scammers frequently lure consumers through social media or emails to fake websites, which are set up to steal personal and/or financial information or could release malware into your computer.

**Avoid potential pitfalls with gift cards.** Gift cards are a frequent target for scammers. Cards sold by individuals or at auction sites often turn out to be stolen or counterfeit. The safest option is to buy gift cards directly from the company's website or physical store. When buying a gift card in a store, make sure the packaging is intact, and the PIN hasn't been scratched off. Be especially cautious with emails, pop-up ads, or websites offering FREE gift cards. These enticements could be an attempt to steal your personal information, release malware into your computer, or otherwise get you to disclose your financial information, like a credit card number. Read more about gift cards and the laws that protect Maryland consumers in our [Consumer's Edge](#).

Scammers also take advantage of the generosity of charity donors during the holiday season. Before donating, check to see if the charity in which you are interested is registered with the [Maryland Secretary of State's Office](#). Several websites (such as GuideStar and Charity Navigator) provide information on an organization's financials, mission statements, and more. This may help you decide how to allocate your giving. Read more about charitable donations in our "[Keeping Your Eyes Open When Donating to Charities](#)" Consumer's Edge.

For additional information about safe online shopping, read our "[Smart Shopping from Home](#)" Consumer's Edge. The Maryland Attorney General's Office offers free publications, including the Consumer's Edge, to educate consumers. A full list of publications can be found at <https://www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/Pages/CPD/Tips-Publications/edunit.aspx>. Consumers are encouraged to download, reproduce, and share these publications.

For additional tips, please follow the Office of Attorney General on Facebook, Instagram, or X and [subscribe](#) to receive our consumer alerts to receive the most up-to-date information on scams, fraud, and consumer news.

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