



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 25, 2020

CONTACT:

Mayor's Press Office

312.744.3334

press@cityofchicago.org

**MAYOR LIGHTFOOT AND BACP ENCOURAGE RESIDENTS TO BE CAUTIOUS OF
CONSUMER FRAUD AMID COVID-19 OUTBREAK**

*As reports of fraud and scams increase, City to offer tips to keep residents safe from
bad actors taking advantage of public health crisis*

CHICAGO – Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot and Chicago Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection (BACP) Commissioner Rosa Escareno today announced guidance for Chicago's residents to be aware of and avoid consumer fraud related to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak, including false advertising, phishing and price gouging. Following an increase in reports of fraudulent practices, BACP is reminding consumers to report suspicious consumer fraud activity to the City by calling 3-1-1 or through the City's [CHI311](#)

“While a reasonable price escalation due to increased demand or decreased supply may occur in the current environment, price gouging on things like medicine and other essential items will not be tolerated by the City of Chicago,” said Mayor Lightfoot. “Today we are reminding residents to report activity immediately, so the City can take action immediately. We are sending a clear message that those who prey on the fears and vulnerabilities of our residents to profit during this time of crisis will be penalized to the fullest extent possible.”

Price gouging is an intentional price increase that goes beyond what would be considered fair or reasonable. In the month of March, BACP has received 190 complaints of price gouging, compared to only two in all of 2019. The majority of complaints are for household or health items such as toilet paper, tissues and hand sanitizer--with some complaints related to food and beverage products, as well. BACP evaluates each complaint based on relevant factors, such as prices prior to the Illinois Disaster Declaration and prices at nearby stores, and will impose fines of up to \$10,000 per offense.

“Now is the time for all of Chicago to come together for the health of our community,” said BACP Commissioner Rosa Escareno. “We will not tolerate bad actors that think of their bottom line instead of their fellow Chicagoan during times like this. I will not hesitate to hold these businesses accountable.”



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



To ensure Chicago's residents are protected from fraudulent practices, BACP recommends the following tips to keep scammers at bay:

- Report businesses and third-party sellers of face masks, hand sanitizer, disinfecting wipes, toilet paper and other essential goods that are being charged for a high mark-up.
- Ignore offers promising vaccines, tests or treatments for COVID-19. At this time, there are no FDA-authorized home test kits for COVID-19. Similarly, there are currently no vaccinations nor treatments for COVID-19.
- Never share your personal or financial information over email, text message or over the phone.
- If considering charitable donations, residents should stick with familiar or reputable organizations.
- Be suspicious of unfamiliar businesses or online sellers who claim to have in-demand products, like cleaning, household, and health and medical supplies. Products may be counterfeit.

"During this unprecedented crisis, we have to take every action possible to ensure Chicago's residents are not exploited through misinformation on fake vaccines or price gouging for essential resources our communities need," said CDPH Commissioner Dr. Arwady. "For the most-up-to-date information on how to prevent COVID-19 and keep yourself safe, residents should adhere to the advice of public health experts, not the scammers seeking profit from fear."

In addition to BACP, consumers can also submit complaints to the [Illinois Attorney General's Office's website](#) or by calling the Consumer Fraud Hotline (1-800-386-5438).

To learn more about COVID-19, including how to stay healthy during the outbreak, please visit www.chicago.gov/coronavirus.

###