

# Maryland Retired School Personnel Association

## CONSUMER CONNECTION

A Publication of the MRSPA Consumer Education Committee

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### Continue to Protect Yourself During the Pandemic

#### **Coronavirus Survey Scam**

- ⇒ You may receive an email or text offering a gift for filling out a survey. The message claims that the recipients need to pay only shipping and handling to receive the prize. But after you pay the fee, you never receive the prize.
- ⇒ Schemes that use links embedded in texts and emails are an attempt to obtain PII (Personally Identifiable Information) that, when used alone or with other relevant data, can identify an individual.

These are phishing scams. They may appear to come from government agencies, financial institutions, shipping firms and social media companies, among many other entities. Carefully examine any message purporting to be from such a source, and do not click on a link in an unsolicited email or text.

#### **Remember that companies won't contact you to ask for your username or password.**

When in doubt, contact the entity that purportedly sent the suspicious, potentially fraudulent message, but **do not click on** anything in it. Use a phone number from an invoice or website rather than contacting a number that may be on the email. Make sure that you rely on reliable sites.

If you have been scammed, the Justice Department urges you to report the communication to the National Center for Disaster Hotline by calling 866-720-5721 or filing an online complaint to the center.

#### **For more good tips, check out AARP's Fraud Watch Network. You can sign up for free Watchdog Alerts.**

#### **2020-2021 MRSPA CONSUMER EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

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**Still have questions about COVID-19 vaccines? Contact:**

**Call us at 1-855-MD-GOVAX for assistance.**

**For more information visit [covidlink.maryland.gov/content/vaccine](https://covidlink.maryland.gov/content/vaccine)**

The new COVID-19 Vaccination Support Center—available at **1-855-MDGOVAX** (1-855-634-6829)—will be open seven days a week from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. Advocates are available

**Stay informed.** Marylanders are also encouraged to visit [covidlink.maryland.gov](https://covidlink.maryland.gov) to review vaccine safety and efficacy information.

**As we proceed with vaccinating the public, we all must keep on slowing the spread of COVID-19.**

**Keep on wearing your mask, watching your distance and washing your hands. You should get tested and quarantine if you expect exposure or show symptoms.**

**For more information about coronavirus in Maryland visit: [coronavirus.maryland.gov](https://coronavirus.maryland.gov).**

**Stay informed and stay safe!**

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## **Domestic Travel Recommendations from the CDC**

Fully vaccinated travelers should still follow CDC's recommendations for traveling safely including:

- ⇒ Wear a mask over your nose and mouth
- ⇒ Stay 6 feet from others and avoid crowds
- ⇒ Wash your hands often or use hand sanitizer

You can monitor current recommendations by checking out the CDC website at



**<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov>**

## Fake COVID-19 Vaccine Card Scam in MD: What You Should Know



MD Attorney General Brian Frosh joined 45 other state AGs in calling for tech companies to crack down on the sale of fake vaccination cards.

Some people may be tempted to buy fake COVID-19 vaccination records to avoid getting the COVID-19 vaccine, but the FBI warns that it's illegal, as well as dangerous. **Thieves are using images people have posted on social media of their CDC-issued cards to sell them online.**

Maryland Attorney General Brian Frosh warned residents **not to share photos of their card.** The card has your full name, date of birth, and when and where you got the vaccine. Thieves can use the information to steal your personal information and commit fraud!

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**Summer is coming and people are looking for quick ways to lose those extra pounds! Some marketers deploy a variety of schemes to get people to purchase their products.**

Some use phony articles claiming that celebrities have achieved great results from their products.

Others use social media, posting bogus stories or quietly paying "influencers" to promote unproven products.

Weight loss products touted as "natural" or "herbal" don't necessarily mean safe or wholesome and some herbal ingredients are toxic in certain doses.

Diet and weight loss programs often encourage you to sign up for a free trial—which, if you read the tiny print, opts you in to getting charged for regular orders or additional products.

Claims that sound too good to be true, such as losing weight, while eating as much as you want, are, well, too good to be true!

Seek advice from a trustworthy source, such as your doctor or a dietitian, before you buy a weight-loss product.

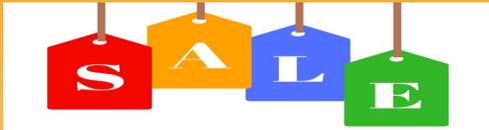
Be skeptical about a product or program promising you'll lose a specific amount of weight per day, week, or month"

Be wary of ads that tout weight-loss products as "a miracle," "revolutionary," or a "scientific breakthrough."

Check out a weight-loss company's reputation by searching with the Better Business Bureau.

Tips from *AARP Fraud Watch Network*





## Great deals in May and June

Watch for great deals in May and June on Mother's and Father's Day gifts as well as restaurant offers.

In June, watch for a 72% bump in deals on outdoor goods, when camping items, fishing gear and similar go on sale at big retailers.



**And don't forget National Donut Day which is celebrated this year on Friday, June 4th. Big chains will likely offer a free donut on this day!**

## It's Time for Farmers' Markets!

Summer starts the season for outdoor grilling, picking up fresh produce at your local farmer's market and having a great day! Not sure where the farmers' markets are in your area? Go to [MD.gov](http://MD.gov) and look for the Farmers' Market directory.



Help our local farmers and get Maryland's best!

## Summer Time Food Safety Basics

Summer time is a great time for getting together with family and friends – often at a park or for a picnic. **Follow these basic food safety steps for safe, and healthy, summer time fun.**



During warm weather, it is especially important to take extra precautions and practice safe food handling when preparing perishable foods such as meat, poultry, seafood and egg products. The warmer weather conditions may be ideal for outdoor picnics and barbecues, but they also provide a perfect environment for bacteria and other pathogens in food to multiply rapidly and cause foodborne illness. Follow the steps below to Fight BAC!® (foodborne bacteria) and reduce the risk of foodborne illness this summer.

**Clean: Wash, Wash, Wash Your Hands (as in Row, Row, Row Your Boat).** Always, wash your hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds before and after handling food. Soap and water is best, but pack some instant hand sanitizer in your picnic basket for those times when soap and water are not available. **Cook: Cook Foods to Proper Temperatures.** Use a food thermometer to ensure that food reaches a safe internal temperature. Once cooked, keep hot foods hot, at 145°F or above.

**Safe Internal Temperatures Hamburgers – 160° F Steaks or roasts – 145° (medium rare) or 160° F (medium) Pork – 160° F Chicken – 165° F Fish – 160° F or until the flesh flakes easily with a fork.**

**Chill: Keep Cold Foods Cold.** Thaw frozen foods in the refrigerator, never on the counter. Harmful bacteria can begin to grow in raw meats, poultry, fish and eggs if left at room temperature. Avoid the Danger Zone – temperatures between 40°F and 140°F – by keeping cold foods on ice or in the refrigerator, and keeping hot foods above 140°F. Limit time in the Danger Zone to 1 hour when the temperature is above 90°F; to 2 hours when the temperature is below 90°F.

**Separate: Stay Away from that Same Old Plate.** When taking foods off the grill, do not put cooked food items back on the same plate that held raw food, unless it has been washed with hot, soapy water first. Wash cutting boards too with warm soapy water to prevent the transfer of germs from one food to another. Sanitize cleaned cutting boards and other surfaces with a dilute bleach solution - 1 teaspoon of bleach per quart of water – and allow to air dry.



## The MD Office of the Attorney General issued a warning—Consumer Alert—Beware Fake Publisher’s Clearinghouse Award Letters!

The Attorney General’s Consumer Protection Division has been notified about a fraudulent “Publisher’s Clearinghouse” (PCH) letter that claims the recipient has won an award of a million dollars, or more, from a random drawing of a serial number called the 2021 Mega Prize Payout. The letter claims that the recipient has been approved for a lump sum payment.

At the top of the scam letter, “Payment of Winnings and Final Notice” is typed in bold, uppercase letters, and just under this is a Reference Number. The letter advises the recipient to contact a “claims agent,” and to keep the award confidential until payment has been made to the recipient’s account. At the bottom of the letter is a photocopied signature and picture of PCH’s Executive Vice President, Deborah Holland.

This letter contains several red flags that it is a scam:

- It asks the recipient to act quickly and confidentially to obtain the prize.
- It contains awkward phrases and grammatical errors.
- The signature and photo at the bottom of the letter are poorly reproduced photocopies.

Always be wary of unsolicited “award” letters, emails, text messages, or other forms of communication, especially if you didn’t enter any contests, sweepstakes or lotteries.

If you receive this letter, report it to the Consumer Protection Division at:

[consumer@oag.state.md.us](mailto:consumer@oag.state.md.us). Do not call any phone numbers listed on the letter.

If you suspect you have been a victim of this scam, call or email the Identity Theft Unit at 410-576-6491 or [idtheft@oag.state.md.us](mailto:idtheft@oag.state.md.us) to learn how to protect your identity and financial information.

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**Stay Safe!!**

**Your Consumer Education Committee Cares About YOU!!!**