

DAILY COVID-19 Misinformation and Scam Report

Date: 04/09/2020

Executive Summary

As of April 9, 2020, COSMOS has a total of 308 entries reflecting a 7% increase of misinformation and scams in the database. Zero reports by Arkansans were received in the past 24 hours. Of the new data manually identified from the web, it appears that vulnerable consumers are being targeted via social-cyber campaigns. For instance, hackers are sending emails with fake HIV results and coronavirus information that infect computers with malware. In order to increase awareness of such scams, a notification to the public via Attorney General's all social media platforms is recommended.

Key Insights

1. Highlights -

a) Hackers are sending emails with fake HIV results and coronavirus information that infect computers with malware. The fake HIV emails are designed to look like they come from Vanderbilt University, possibly to exploit the credibility of the Vanderbilt University Medical Center. Users are prompted to install macros, which leads them to becoming infected with malware known as the *Koadic Remote Access Trojan*.

b) A misleading claim being spread via Facebook states: "Let your fever run up to 103 degrees to fight coronavirus." This claim comes from a Facebook user who claims to have received the advice came from a retired respiratory therapist. A fever makes it harder for some viruses to survive, but it's not yet known whether that's true for the novel coronavirus.

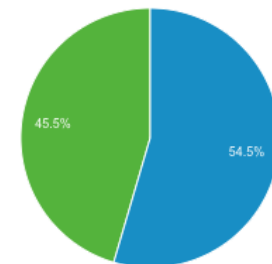
2. Over the past 24 hours, the top sources being used to spread COVID-19 misinformation are:

- a. Facebook
- b. Websites
- c. Instagram
- d. Twitter

3. We observed 10 new visitors to the website in the last 24 hours. All the new visitors were seeking information from the website, i.e., no new scams were reported.

4. Close to half are return visitors to the website and remaining half being new visitors, which is a good indicator for a successful website.

■ Returning Visitor ■ New Visitor



5. COSMOS has noted outreach to five other states: California, South Carolina, Texas, Ohio, and Tennessee.

Top three misinformation themes – NO CHANGE.

- “5G causes coronavirus (COVID-19)”
- Fake products and/or techniques to prevent and/or kill coronavirus
- Conspiracy theories claiming that the government is using the coronavirus to control citizens and/or is a fake crisis used to advance government’s planned agendas.

Recommendations - Immediate exposure to UALR’s COSMOS website to Arkansans will greatly enhance data collection resulting in better informed consumers. This can be accomplished through a coordinated public affairs social media campaign via the two offices, i.e., AG’s and UALR’s communications/public affairs offices. The concept would involve paid posts via Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. We can help prepare a cost proposal, if needed.

Additionally, develop and broadcast messaging to address the following: 1) Communicate to citizens in order to protect themselves from email phishing attempts, experts recommend using unique passwords across accounts, multi-factor authentication, running regular virus scans on their computer, and being skeptical of emails from unfamiliar sources that trigger an emotional reaction; 2) Communicate to citizens the appropriate CDC guidance on treating fevers and how to telehealth; 3) Craft messaging geared towards quelling growing citizen fears related to 5G technology; and 4) Extend communication efforts to expand reach into the additional Arkansas counties, focusing first along the interstates, followed by state highways, country roads, etc.