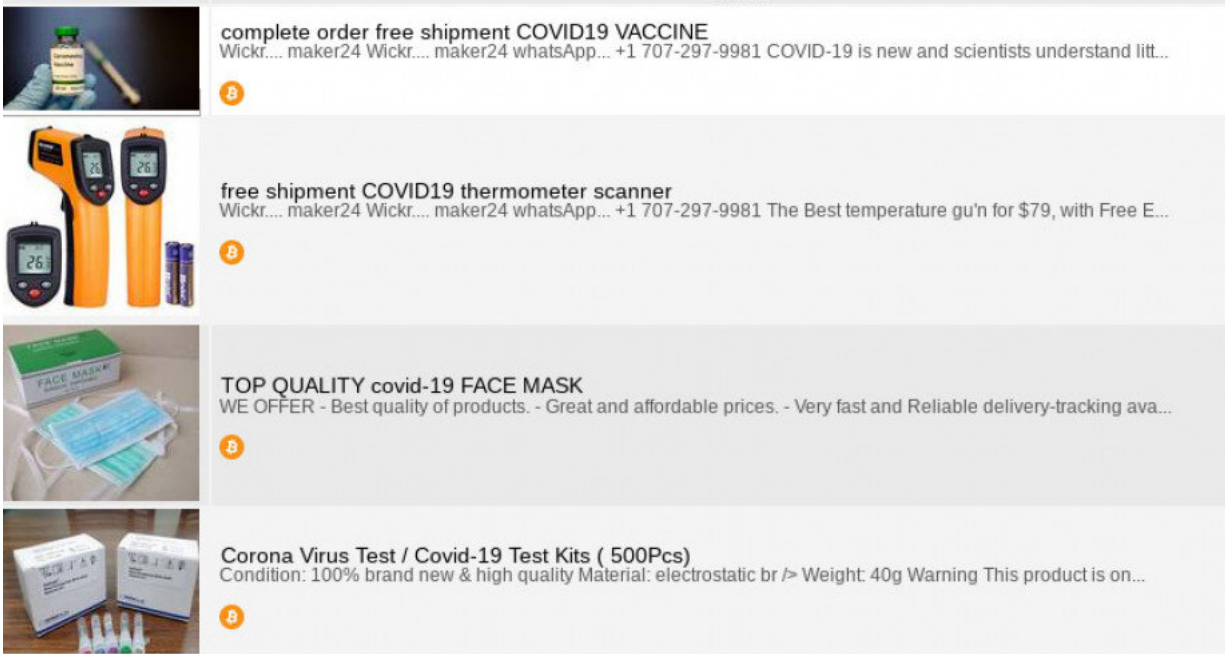


Pandemic profiting: Vaccines and PPE on the dark web

April 30 2020



The screenshot displays a list of four items for sale on a dark web marketplace. Each item includes a small image, a title, a description, and a Bitcoin icon. The items are:

- complete order free shipment COVID19 VACCINE**
Wickl.... maker24 Wickr.... maker24 whatsapp... +1 707-297-9981 COVID-19 is new and scientists understand litt...
- free shipment COVID19 thermometer scanner**
Wickl.... maker24 Wickr.... maker24 whatsapp... +1 707-297-9981 The Best temperature gu'n for \$79, with Free E...
- TOP QUALITY covid-19 FACE MASK**
WE OFFER - Best quality of products. - Great and affordable prices. - Very fast and Reliable delivery-tracking ava...
- Corona Virus Test / Covid-19 Test Kits (500Pcs)**
Condition: 100% brand new & high quality Material: electrostatic br /> Weight: 40g Warning This product is on...

Credit: Australian National University

Vendors on the dark web are selling Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and drugs marketed as coronavirus vaccines or cures at high cost, according to a new study from The Australian National University (ANU).

Commissioned by the Australian Institute of Criminology, Professor

Rod Broadhurst, Matt Ball and Jessie Jiang from the ANU Cybercrime Observatory analysed 20 darknet markets in April to identify the scale of online underground sales of COVID-19 related products including PPE, vaccines, ventilators, anti-viral medicines and test kits.

"For some people out there this pandemic is a criminal opportunity where they can cash in on fear and shortages. We think we will see more of that and we need some basic monitoring to start shutting it down," said Professor Broadhurst.

"We found unsafe vaccines, repurposed antivirals—which are in very short supply—and quite a lot of bulk PPE on the dark web.

"The biosecurity hazardous products are the most dangerous because some are marketed as if they have been leaked from real trials. But, they could be fake and we don't know what they are made from."

The study found 12 markets posting COVID-19 products with three markets accounting for 85 percent of all 645 listings.

Of all the listings, almost half (44.6 percent) were PPE items such as surgical masks—often in bulk quantities—and a third were anti-viral or repurposed medicines.

Drugs promoted as 'vaccines' accounted for nearly 10 percent of the listings and were among the most expensive—along with full PPE gear and thermo-scanners.

"We really need to shut down underground sales of vaccines and experimental drugs because there are a lot of nasty side effects," said Professor Broadhurst.

"Apart from likely fraud, details about the origin or composition of

vaccines were sparse. These products may have been diverted from animal or [human trials](#), or even sourced from recovered COVID-19 patients."

The most expensive [vaccine](#) was listed at \$24,598—shipped from the U.S.—with the average cost of a vaccine around \$575. Vaccines allegedly sourced from China were costly, fetching up to more than \$23,000.

Professor Broadhurst said there are immediate health concerns for unapproved or fake vaccines being up for grabs on the black market.

"Fake vaccines could assist in the spread of the virus because users may behave as if they are immune but nevertheless become exposed to the coronavirus," he said.

"The premature release of vaccines undergoing animal or human trial would also misguide users as to immunity but may also impact on the success of these crucial clinical trials."

Deputy Director of the Australian Institute of Criminology Dr. Rick Brown said the results will help inform the government's response to people trying to profit from the sale of medical supplies during a pandemic.

"The sale of fake vaccines and other compromised medical items poses a real risk to the health and safety of the public and needs to be dealt with swiftly. These results will assist our law enforcement partners in tackling this concerning issue."

Provided by Australian National University

Citation: Pandemic profiting: Vaccines and PPE on the dark web (2020, April 30) retrieved 26 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-04-pandemic-profiting-vaccines-ppe-dark.html>

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