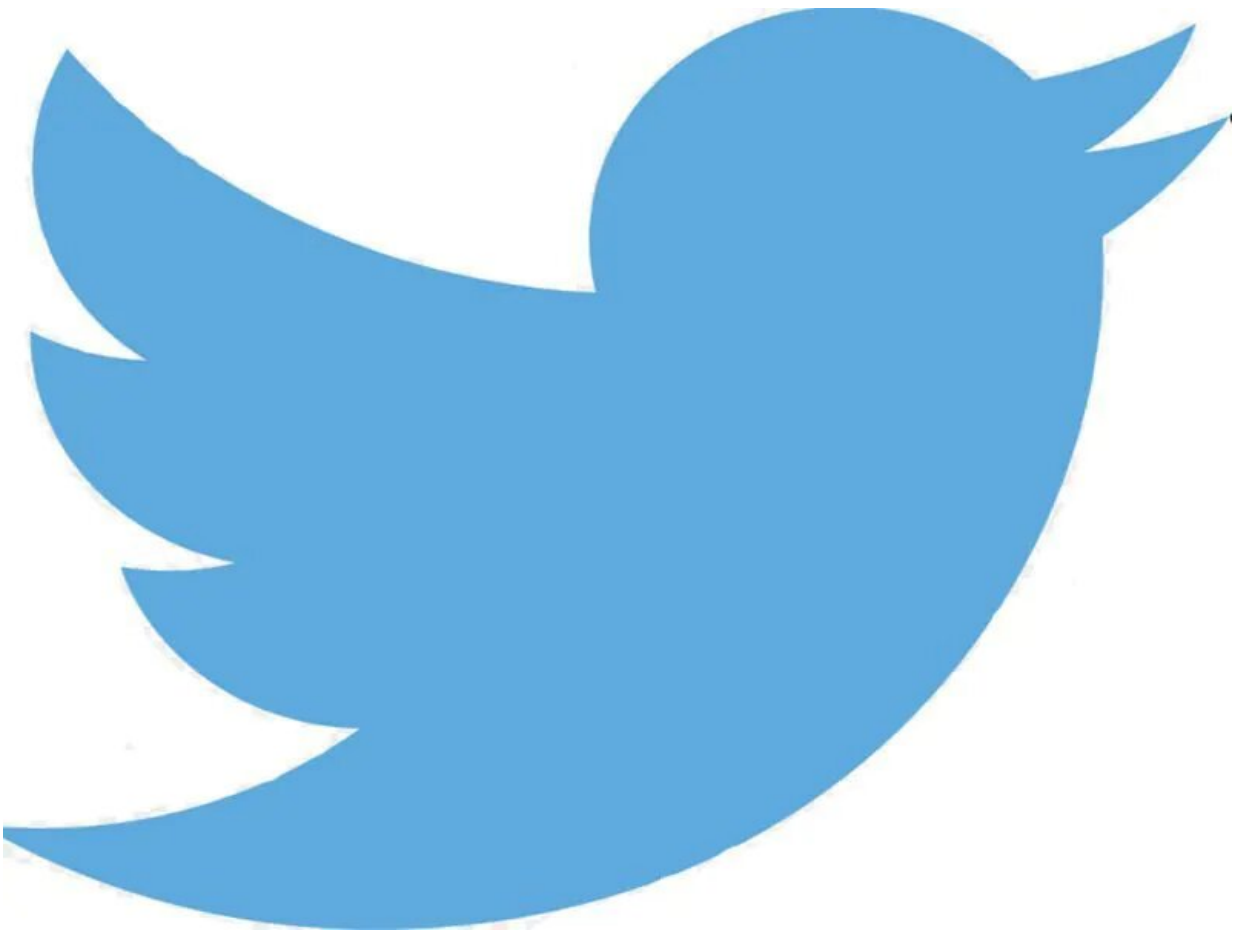


Watch out for coronavirus scams on social media

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(HealthDay)—Social media has been rife with fake health products and

financial scams during the coronavirus pandemic, a new study finds.

Thousands of posts have touted illegal or unapproved testing kits, untested treatments and purported but counterfeit cures, according to researchers who analyzed posts on Twitter and Instagram.

"From March to May 2020, we have identified nearly 2,000 fraudulent postings likely tied to fake COVID-19 health products, financial scams, and other consumer risk," said lead author Timothy Mackey, an associate adjunct professor of medicine at the University of California, San Diego.

There were two waves of posts for unproven cures and fake testing kits, and a third wave is now appearing. Mackey predicted it will worsen when officials announce an effective vaccine or treatment(s).

The study was recently published in the *Journal of Medical Internet Research Public Health and Surveillance*.

"We're in a post-digital era and as this boom of digital adoption continues, we will see more of these fraudulent postings targeting consumers as criminals seek to take advantage of those in need during times of a crisis," Mackey said in a UCSD news release.

He offered tips on how to identify fraudulent products or scams:

- If it's too good to be true, it probably is. Be wary if there are mentions of bulk or rapid sales, cheap pricing and questionable claims such as U.S. Food and Drug Administration approval or specific certifications.
- It's probably illegal to import products such as COVID-19 tests from abroad. Such purchases should be considered risky.
- If the seller is doing business or transactions through [social media](#)

direct messaging or a communications app—including Skype or WhatsApp—it's probably not legitimate.

"We recommend that anyone concerned of contracting COVID-19 or hoping to be tested first work with their personal health care provider or local public [health](#) agency to ensure safe access to testing or treatment, and report any [suspicious activity](#) to [federal authorities](#)," Mackey said.

"Our hope is that the results from this study will better inform social media users so they can better decipher between fraudulent and legitimate posts," he added. "We conducted this research with the goal that eventually it will lead to improved tools and policy changes so that social [media](#) can be used as a force for good."

More information: The U.S. Federal Trade Commission offers [coronavirus advice for consumers](#).

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