Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Alerts Members About COVID-19 Vaccine Fraud Schemes

BOSTON, Jan. 27, 2021 /PRNewswire/ -- Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts ("Blue Cross") is reminding members to be vigilant as scammers seek to take advantage of the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines.

"There is such a pent-up demand for the vaccine and the roll-out is going to be limited for a while because of manufacturing capability – this provides an environment ripe for fraud," said Jennifer Stewart, senior director for fraud investigation and prevention at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts.

Stewart cautions that scammers have already created websites similar to Massachusetts' official vaccine appointment website in an attempt to collect health insurance and financial information.

"What they've done is change one letter of the website name so that it looks almost identical to the legitimate state website," said Stewart. "This is a good reminder to not click on email links but instead visit www.mass.gov or your health care provider's website and navigate from there to be safe."

Offers of early vaccine access

Email phishing scams are also rampant, offering recipients the chance to "preregister" with a public health department to receive a vaccine.

"Right now there is no preregistration in Massachusetts and any site offering that is a scam," Stewart said. "What they are looking to do is collect health insurance and financial information, which they then use for their schemes or to sell on the dark web."

While health care providers may reach out when an individual is eligible to be vaccinated, they are not going to reach out unsolicited offering early access to the vaccine while making requests for payments or soliciting personal health insurance and financial information, Stewart stressed.

"As the distribution starts ramping up, people are going to get solicited to pay to get ahead in the line. Consumers should know that's not possible," she said. "The federal government has bought the vaccine, insurers are paying for administration for their members, you can't pay to cut the line and get early access in Massachusetts. If that's what you're being told, that's a scam."

Federal agencies also have warned of vaccine-related scams, including fake ads for vaccines on social media platforms.

Consumers should always double check that sources of information are verified and legitimate and never share personal health or financial information with anyone other than known and trusted medical professionals, the agencies said.

Avoiding potential fraud

Stewart's best advice to consumers is to sit tight, wait, and make sure they get a legitimate vaccine. She also reminds Blue Cross members that their health insurance will cover the cost of vaccination with no out-of-pocket costs. Medicare will cover vaccine administration for Medicare Advantage and Medex members when administered by any clinician who accepts Medicare.

Members with questions can call the Blue Cross COVID-19 helpline at **1-888-372-1970**.

Reporting suspected fraud

The Massachusetts Attorney General's Office encourages anyone with questions or concerns to call their consumer hotline at 617-727-8400 or file a complaint online.

If you believe you have been the victim of a COVID-19 fraud, you can report it to the FBI (ic3.gov, tips.fbi.gov, or 1-800-CALL-FBI) or HHS OIG (tips.hhs.gov or 1-800-HHS-TIPS).

About Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (www.bluecrossma.org) is a community-focused, tax-paying, not-for-profit health plan headquartered in Boston. We are committed to the relentless pursuit of quality, affordable health care*with* an unparalleled consumer experience. Consistent with our promise to always put our members first, we are rated among the nation's best health plans for member satisfaction and quality. Connect with us on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn.

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For further information: Amy McHugh, amy.mchugh@bcbsma.com