

Scam Alert – Government Imposters

By Putnam County State Bank – To Keep it From Happening to You

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The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the FTC want you to know about a scam in which callers posing as federal employees are trying to get or verify personal information.

Sometimes, the caller asks you to verify your name, and then just hangs up. Other times, he or she might ask for detailed information — like the last digits of your Social Security or bank account number. Imposters might say they need this information to help you or a family member. But their real reason is to steal from you or sell your information to other crooks.

Your caller ID might even read “HHS Tips” or “Federal Government” when they call. The phone number could have the “202” Washington, DC area code, the headquarters for many federal agencies. The phone number may even be for a real government agency. But don’t be fooled: Scammers know how to rig their caller IDs to show false information.

Here are a few tips for handling these calls:

- If you get a strange call from the government, hang up. If you want to check it out, visit the official (.gov) website for contact information. Government employees won’t call out of the blue to demand money or account information.
- Don’t give out — or confirm — your personal or financial information to someone who calls.
- Don’t wire money or send money using a reloadable card. In fact, never pay someone who calls out of the blue, even if the name or number on the caller ID looks legit.
- Feeling pressured to act immediately? Hang up. That’s a sure sign of a scam.

So how can you tell the caller is an imposter?

- The federal government typically will contact you by U.S. Mail first, **not by phone or email**.
- Federal agencies **will not demand personal information** like your Social Security Number or bank account number over the phone. Also, just because the caller knows details about you, doesn’t mean she is trustworthy.

- The caller typically asks you to send money – often via wire transfer, by using a prepaid debit card, or maybe by sending you a fake check to cash. Federal agencies **will not** ask you to use *any* of these methods to send money for *any* reason.

...and what should you do?

- **Hang up.** Do not give out any personal or financial information.
- **Contact the Department of Health and Human Services OIG** at 1-800-HHS-TIPS (1-800-447-8477) or spoof@oig.hhs.gov
- **File a complaint with the FTC** at ftc.gov/complaint or 877-FTC-HELP.
- **Learn more** about government imposter scams and sign up for the FTC's Scam Alerts.
- Pass on what you've learned to older consumers and others.