

# US Department of Justice launches new COVID-19 anti-fraud initiative

By Sam Ramer

**In mid-March, Attorney General William Barr directed all US Attorneys in every district in the United States to change the priority of their individual offices to focus on the investigation and prosecution of coronavirus-related fraud schemes. Following up, Deputy Attorney General Jeffrey Rosen further directed each US Attorney to appoint a coronavirus fraud coordinator in each federal district. This coordinator will be legal counsel for the federal judicial district on coronavirus issues, direct the prosecution of coronavirus-related crimes and conduct outreach and awareness. In the District of Columbia, Principal Assistant US Attorney Alessio Evangelista has been designated as the coronavirus coordinator. While each of the districts may appoint their own coordinator, the assignment of the Principal Assistant (the second highest position in the office) sends a signal to the rest of the Justice Department of the seriousness of purpose within the DOJ. The effect this will have on the prosecution of other types of crime remains to be seen. COVID-19 is already causing major disruption in courthouses, with criminal grand juries and trials delayed.**

The net being cast by DOJ is wide: The Attorney General is urging the public to report accusations of COVID-19-related fraud by contacting the National Center for Disaster Fraud (NCDF) hotline. These include:

- Individuals and businesses selling fake cures for COVID-19 online and engaging in other forms of fraud.
- Phishing emails from entities posing as the World Health Organization or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- Malicious websites and apps that appear to share coronavirus-related information to gain and lock access to your devices until payment is received.
- Entities seeking donations fraudulently for illegitimate or non-existent charitable organizations.
- Medical providers obtaining patient information for COVID-19 testing and then using that information to fraudulently bill for other tests and procedures.

In addition, DOJ will be coordinating with other federal agencies and state and local law enforcement offices.

Media interest in coronavirus is intense, and fraud stories are bound to garner attention. The FBI can be expected to take these cases seriously, and thus, the likelihood of investigative subpoenas and interviews regarding allegations of fraud are likely to continue for the conceivable future. Those individuals and organizations trying to find palliative or unusual treatments for disease may find themselves being examined by law enforcement depending on the size and the type of the complaints received. Healthcare companies and other businesses that are involved in COVID-19 responses should consult with counsel before any new initiative or outreach.



Norton Rose Fulbright is a global law firm. We provide the world's preeminent corporations and financial institutions with a full business law service. We have more than 3700 lawyers and other legal staff based in Europe, the United States, Canada, Latin America, Asia, Australia, Africa and the Middle East.

**Law around the world**

[nortonrosefulbright.com](http://nortonrosefulbright.com)

Norton Rose Fulbright Verein, a Swiss verein, helps coordinate the activities of Norton Rose Fulbright members but does not itself provide legal services to clients. Norton Rose Fulbright has offices in more than 50 cities worldwide, including London, Houston, New York, Toronto, Mexico City, Hong Kong, Sydney and Johannesburg. For more information, see [nortonrosefulbright.com/legal-notices](http://nortonrosefulbright.com/legal-notices). The purpose of this communication is to provide information as to developments in the law. It does not contain a full analysis of the law nor does it constitute an opinion of any Norton Rose Fulbright entity on the points of law discussed. You must take specific legal advice on any particular matter which concerns you. If you require any advice or further information, please speak to your usual contact at Norton Rose Fulbright.

© Norton Rose Fulbright [Office entity]. Extracts may be copied provided their source is acknowledged.  
US\_23004 – 03/20