

Millions of Americans have received or are awaiting a gift from Uncle Sam to help them get through the coronavirus pandemic. As part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act passed on March 27, the federal government is sending out \$290 billion in stimulus checks over the next half a year.

The first round of checks made its way to millions of checking accounts across the country during the second week of April and the next round is expected to be sent within a few weeks. The remainder will be mailed out over the following 20 weeks.

Unfortunately, scammers are doing all they can to get their hands on these checks before they reach the rightful recipients. The best way to keep your money safe from scammers is to arm yourself with information about the checks and to learn how to spot the scams.

To help you keep every dollar that's coming to you and avoid falling victim to these scams, has compiled this comprehensive guide on the stimulus check process and the connected scams.

Important information about the stimulus checks

Many Americans aren't aware of this crucial fact: You do not need to take any action to receive your stimulus check. There is no form to fill out, no number to call, and no information to share. Every eligible citizen should receive the check without having to take any action.

The feds are using the most recent tax filing information they have from each eligible citizen to send out the checks. They will use information from 2019 tax returns to determine the check amount and get recipients their money. Those who haven't yet filed taxes this year (the tax deadline has been extended to July 15), will have the information from their 2018 taxes used. Social Security recipients, and anyone else not required to file taxes, do not need to take action either; the government already has their information on file.

There is no need to share information, such as a Social Security number, checking account number or home address, with anyone. There is no need to "sign up" for your check either. All you need to do is wait for your check to land in your mailbox or in your account. Remember the simple rule: There is no need to take any action to receive your check.

When you may need to take action

The only exception to the above rule applies to those who have not yet filed taxes for 2018. These citizens may need to submit a simple tax return to receive their check.

Also, the government has shared that it can only deposit the money directly into checking accounts if it has this information on file for the recipient. This criterion includes nearly all citizens who've received a tax refund for the taxes they filed in 2018 or 2019. Individuals receiving their checks via direct deposit will likely have their money sooner. Consequently, many people want to share this information with the IRS before the checks are sent out. It can be done via this link, which can also be used to look up the status of your check. Unfortunately, though, many people have reported that the IRS site has not been working properly recently, which is likely due to heavy traffic.

How the scams play out

The scammers trying to nab stimulus checks count on victims thinking they need to take action to get their checks. They use a variety of means, including phone calls, emails, text messages and social media posts, to ask victims to share information that will allegedly enable them to receive their checks. They

may ask for the victim's Social Security number, date of birth, PayPal account information, checking account details, home address or other personal information, claiming it is a necessary "sign up" step in the stimulus check distribution.

Alternatively, they may claim they can help you receive your check earlier through their website if you share certain information with them. They'll often use sophisticated spoofing methods to make it appear as if they are legitimate government representatives. Once they have this information, though, they will reach out to the IRS to change your information so your check goes directly into their own accounts. Or, they may hack your account to withdraw the stimulus money as soon as it arrives.

If you receive any phone calls or messages asking for your personal information so you can receive your check, you are looking at a scam. Do not respond. Report the scam to the FTC at [ftc.gov](https://www.ftc.gov). The federal government has made it clear it will not be reaching out to citizens and asking for information before sending out checks. It has also shared that there is no way for anyone to gain early access to the stimulus check money.

Stay safe!