

# Be On the Lookout (BOLO) for Free COVID-19 Testing Fraud Sites



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Type in “free COVID-19 testing near me” into popular social media programs and you might be surprised to see advertisements that aren’t associated with a health department, a government service agency, or a trusted pharmacy or health care provider. In fact, you may notice information about a pop-up testing site down the road in a busy commercial area. Free COVID-19 testing sites generally fall into three categories:

1. Legitimate sites sponsored by government or trusted health care providers
2. Fraudulent sites run by identity thieves
3. Private testing companies of unknown origin

Legitimate sites can usually be verified online and are often associated with a health department, government agency, or established health care provider. Fraudulent sites often appear and disappear quickly and may be run out of a van or have a portable table and tent with a sign emphasizing the test is “free.” The sole purpose of fraudulent sites is to obtain identity, insurance, or even credit card information – and the scammers may ask individuals to link to a QR Code directly through their smart phone camera in lieu of paper forms, creating obvious cybersecurity concerns. During the start of the pandemic,

some fraudulent testing sites focused on getting credit card information to commit financial theft. Recently, the scammers may be focusing on identity and insurance information since free testing is more widely available and individuals are hesitant to provide their information due to fraud prevention education. Individuals rarely receive test results, although some

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scammers may offer paper copies of fake rapid negative test results on the spot or offer downloadable copies by accessing a specific online link (of cyberfraud concern). Another concern is that individuals using these sites may expose themselves to questionable sample collection and infection control risks or may be given a false negative test result.

Private testing companies of unknown origin are a growing trend for “free” COVID-19 testing. While some are legitimate and may be subcontractors for government agencies and health care providers, fake and profit-driven sites can be difficult to identify. They may have set up a semipermanent building in a church or small business parking lot, are often staffed by professional-looking staff in clinical garb or protective gear, and/or offer drive-thru services. They usually have large, colorful signs with logos, a URL, and phone contact information that can be verified through

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a recently initiated website. In some cases, they ask for a driver’s license (containing a date of birth), email, cell phone number, health insurance, health history, employer, and, occasionally, a credit card, which they photograph or copy on-site. They often

justify this by indicating they are required to verify an individual’s identity to provide the free test and contact information to provide the test results. Occasionally the staff will explain that the test procedure is free but the laboratory will bill the insurance. However, individuals usually find out the entire testing process wasn’t free when the laboratory bills them, their insurance, or employer directly. The purpose of these entities isn’t usually identity theft, although some may be selling data to information brokers, but to make a profit from COVID-19 testing.

A recent and concerning trend is pop-up COVID-19 testing sites that tell the individual they only need a copy of their driver’s license and address and don’t need insurance information. The advertisements for these types of pop-up entities may indicate “government-funded free COVID-19 tests” and occasionally offer in-home testing services by appointment. The concern with these companies is that they may mostly be identity thieves and/or are illegally billing the federal government [program](#) for COVID-19 claims reimbursement for the uninsured, regardless of insurance. In some cases, these companies hide behind layers

of subcontractors, laboratories, or staffing agencies – making them difficult to track and identify. The bottom line is to be on the lookout for fraudulent and questionable COVID-19 testing sites. Awareness and avoidance are your best defenses. ↗