

## **Those free COVID-19 money offers on WhatsApp and Facebook are scams**

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Have you seen a message on WhatsApp or Facebook offering you free help during the pandemic? People have reported seeing messages that seem to be from Pepsi, Walmart, Whole Foods, Target, and other big-name brands. These messages all offer money to people who need it — through grants, coupons for food support, or other giveaways. But they're all fake, and not from those companies at all.

You might get this kind of message, in English or Spanish, from a friend or contact. The message tells you to click a link to get your money. If you click, you might find a survey to take. Or they might ask you to enter your name, address, phone number, or other information. And they might ask you to forward the message to several friends to be eligible to collect.

But what these message are really doing is running a phishing scam to collect your information (and your friends' info), and possibly putting malware on your phone, tablet, or computer if you click the link. There's no money to get, and no help to be had. Just scammers. It could have been a real (and hopeful) friend who forwarded that message to you — but it could have been a scammer who hacked your friend's account.

So: what do you do if you get one of these messages?

- Don't click on any links. That could download malware, expose you to even more scams, or add your phone number to lists sold to still other scammers.
  - Delete the messages — and certainly don't share them.
  - Call the friend who shared the message. Did they forward it to you? If not, tell them their account might have been hacked. If so, share this blog post with them.
- If you already clicked or shared, run a security scan on your device to look for malware. And then share this blog post with the friends you forwarded the message to — and ask them to do the same.

And then tell the FTC: [ftc.gov/complaint](https://ftc.gov/complaint).