

Battling online coronavirus scams with facts

Panic and confusion about the recent coronavirus outbreak spurred attackers and hackers to launch several malware campaigns across the world, relying on a tried-and-true method to infect people's machines: fear. Cybercriminals targeted users in Japan with an Emotet campaign that included malicious Word documents that allegedly contained information about coronavirus prevention. Malware embedded into PDFs, MP4s, and Docx files circulated online, bearing titles that alluded to protection tips. Phishing emails that allegedly came from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) were spotted, too. Malwarebytes also found a novel scam purporting to direct users to a donation page to help support government and medical research. All of these threats rely on the same dangerous intersection of misinformation and panic—a classic and grotesque cybercrime tactic. A great defense to these is, quite simply, the truth. Coronavirus online scams are largely similar to one another. By preying on misinformation and fear, cybercriminals hope to trick unwitting individuals into opening files and documents that promise information about the virus.

The scam email—titled “URGENT: Coronavirus, Can we count on your support today?”—purportedly comes from the nondescript “Department of Health.” Inside, the email asks users to donate to coronavirus prevention causes.

“We need your support, would you consider donating 100 HKD to help us achieve our mission?” the email says near its end, before offering a disguised link that opens an application, not a website. The link itself begins with neither HTTPS nor HTTP, but “HXXP.”

Coronavirus information and data resources

If you're afraid about the spread of coronavirus, we understand. But please, do not click any links in any sketchy emails, and do not donate to any causes you have not already vetted outside of your email client.

- The World Health Organization's [main information page on the virus](#)
- The WHO's daily [“situation reports”](#)
- The WHO's [“Mythbusters” page](#)
- The WHO's [public advice guide](#)
- The Center for Disease Control and Prevention's [main information page on the virus](#)