The New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness (NJOHSP) is operating at 100 percent capacity and is in lockstep with the needs of the community. Alongside our partners, we remain committed to keeping you informed on the growing pandemic associated with the coronavirus (COVID19):

• Inaccurate information and scams have been circulating on the COVID19 pandemic. Text messages falsely warning of a "mandatory quarantine," misinformation spread across social media pages and websites, and an anti-US disinformation campaign driven by foreignstate-sponsored media outlets are recent actions intended to cause panic and take advantage of unsuspecting individuals, physically and virtually. We encourage you to stay up to date on these COVID19 false claims and scams with our latest intelligence products (attached and linked below) and by following us on social media.

◦ https://www.njhomelandsecurity.gov/analysis/false-text-messages-part-of-larger-covid-19-disinformation-campaign

◦ https://www.njhomelandsecurity.gov/analysis/njohsp-urges-residents-to-verify-covid-19-information-be-alert-for-potential-scammers

◦ https://www.njhomelandsecurity.gov/analysis/iranian-russian-and-chinese-media-drive-covid-19-disinformation-campaign

• Please visit the "Interfaith" tab at https://www.njohsp.gov/interfaith for a comprehensive suite of resources and tools. Additional information regarding COVID19-related topics will be forthcoming on the page.

• NJOHSP will continue to coordinate with our local, county, State, and federal law enforcement partners. We encourage all IAC members to continue reporting suspicious activity to law enforcement or directly to our Counterterrorism Watch desk at any time by calling1-866-4-SAFE-NJ (1-866-472-3365) or emailing tips@njohsp.gov.

• Please report cybersecurity incidents to our New Jersey Cybersecurity and Communications Integration Cell (NJCCIC) by calling 1-833-4-NJCCIC (1-833-465-2242) or by filling out a cyber incident form at https://www.cyber.nj.gov/report. Additionally, please visit https://www.cyber.nj.gov for cybersecurity best practices and resources.

NJOHSP Urges Residents to Verify COVID-19 Information,

Be Alert for Potential Scammers

Several individuals and groups are attempting to leverage the COVID-19 pandemic in order to cause panic and scam unsuspecting residents. NJOHSP urges all residents to ensure the validity of information from online platforms and be wary of scams targeting unwitting residents, virtually and physically.

• Over the last week, an NJOHSP review found that misinformation has spread in a growing number of private groups and messages, which are difficult for social media companies to moderate. Furthermore, a private tech company identified at least 80 US-based websites posting misleading or false information about the disease, including

CDC.news and Science.news.

• On March 10, local police in Moorestown (Burlington County) warned residents of people purporting to be from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), specifically that "there have been social media posts regarding individuals going door to door claiming to be from the CDC."

• On March 5, Cybersecurity firm Check Point reported that over 4,000 coronavirus-related domains had been registered since the beginning of 2020, and 3 percent were considered malicious and another 5 percent were suspicious. Additionally, the company reported an increase in phishing attacks to lure victims into unwittingly installing a computer virus under the guise of coronavirus-themed emails containing attachments. Scammers leveraged fake domains such as "cdc-gov.org" instead of the correct "cdc.gov."

Iranian, Russian, and Chinese Media Drive COVID-19

Disinformation Campaign

Several state-sponsored media outlets have promoted an anti-US sentiment suggesting that the United States has deliberately spread COVID-19 and broadcast the theory that the virus may be a manufactured bioweapon. Iran has suggested that Israeli and "Zionist" scientists have used the epidemic to engineer an even more deadly strain of the virus to spread around the world, specifically in Iran.

• The commander in chief of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps said that COVID-19 might be a biological weapon developed by the United States. He stated, "We will be victorious in the fight against this virus—which might be the product of the American biological invasion that first hit China and then Iran and other parts of the world. And America should know that if it did do this, it will come back to it."

• Russian media has spread the Iranian conspiracy theories, including the suggestion that the United States developed COVID-19 as a biological weapon. Chinese media has focused on discrimination and racism against China due to the outbreak as well as circulating conspiracy theories about the CIA's creation of COVID-19 to keep China from developing economically.

• Jihadists on social media have contributed to the media disinformation campaign by circulating posters depicting President Donald Trump and the CIA as being behind the deployment of COVID-19, using hashtags such as "Corona is Trump's Weapon" with graphics featuring the president.

False Text Messages Part of Larger COVID-19 Disinformation

Campaign

Earlier this week, multiple US-based cellular customers received targeted text messages that falsely warned of an impending "mandatory quarantine," highlighting cybersecurity concerns. Federal and State government officials remain committed to sharing timely and accurate information on COVID-19 and actively investigating false claims that may harm national security efforts. NJOHSP previously published two products addressing individuals and groups attempting to leverage the COVID-19 pandemic in order to cause panic and scam unsuspecting residents, as well as foreign governments engaging in disinformation campaigns to undermine US security.

• Starting on March 15, US cellular subscribers received text messages in which the author claimed to have a connection to someone working at a clinic or government agency and revealed unannounced plans for an impending lockdown or quarantine. The messages follow similar patterns and suggest the recipient stockpile food, gas, medicine, or other necessities and pass the information onto others.

• One text falsely stated that President Donald Trump would enact the Stafford Act and order a two-week mandatory quarantine. The National Security Council quickly took to Twitter on March 15 to disprove the rumors of a national quarantine.

• The US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) experienced suspicious cyber activity the same evening related to its coronavirus response and may have been victim to a distributed denial of service, or DDoS attack. According to officials, the attack was unsuccessful, and HHS systems were not significantly affected.