Watch Out for These Coronavirus and HIV Email Scams

Don’t be lured by phishing messages claiming to be from the World Health Organization, FedEx and others.

March 11, 2020 By Trent Straube

Hackers are taking advantage of our growing anxiety about health issues. They’re sending out fake emails promising HIV results and important information about the new coronavirus. But when unsuspecting recipients open the attached documents, malware infects their computers, allowing thieves to steal a variety of information over months-long periods. Such scams are known as phishing.

One such phishing scam promises HIV test results and is designed to look like emails from Vanderbilt University. As BuzzFeed News reports, the emails have been sent to insurance, pharmaceutical and health care companies.

Other scammers are taking advantage of fears about the new coronavirus, which causes COVID-19 disease. As cybersecurity company Proofpoint reports, some hackers use conspiracy theories to lure their victims by promising, for example, to deliver proof that the outbreaks are really the result of man-made bioweapons.

Fortinet, another digital security expert, published an analysis titled “Attackers Taking Advantage of Coronavirus/COVID-19 Media Frenzy” that documents several waves of cyberattacks in the past quarter. The phishing attempts have targeted regions in the world with documented outbreaks, notably Italy. One fake email included in the Fortinet analysis appears to be from the World Health Organization (WHO). Here’s the text:

> Dear Lord/Lady,
>
> Due to the fact that cases of coronavirus infection are documented in your area, the World Health Organization has prepared a document that includes all necessary precautions against coronavirus infection. We strongly recommend that you read the document attached to this message!

Sincerely,

Dr. Penelope Marchetti (World Health Organization—Italy)

The email attachment is designed to look like a Microsoft Word document, but it isn’t legit. Once a reader opens it, malware is installed in his or her computer.

Another email attack is designed to look like a FedEx PDF updating users on how the coronavirus outbreak is affecting deliveries. That email also asks readers to download and open an attached document to learn more details.

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