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COURTS AND COVID-19



Do I have to report for Jury Duty during the COVID-19 outbreak? In Florida, anyone summoned for jury duty before April 17, doesn't have to go.

This and other FAQ are answered on local clerk and court websites. To make that easier for you, here's a summary of what's happening in Central Florida and links for more information in each judicial circuit.

The Florida Supreme Court issued a statewide halt to most face-to-face legal proceedings through March 27 and has said it plans to extend emergency measures through April 17, 2020. That includes grand jury proceedings, jury selection, and criminal and civil jury trials.

However most courthouses are not closed entirely. Certain limited court proceedings considered essential, like first appearances for people newly arrested, bond hearings and hearings on petitions for restraining orders and emergency guardianship, are still being held, but typically are not open to the public. Also, those hearings are being conducted remotely whenever possible.

You can find the latest guidelines for your local courts on each circuit's website:

[9th Circuit for Orange and Osceola](#)
[18th Circuit for Seminole and Brevard](#)
[5th Circuit for Lake](#)

To help reduce the spread of COVID-19, our office recently implemented new general business hours (Mon-Fri 8:00 am to 1:00 pm), closed public access to all our lobbies, and implemented essential staffing plans. Details are available [on our website at SA18.org](#)

*OrlandoSentinel, FICourts

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COVID-19 SCAMS

New fraud schemes exploiting the coronavirus public health emergency are causing authorities to issue warnings. Scammers are creating websites, using phone and email, and posting disinformation on social media platforms. Here are the top 6 categories now.

Testing & Treatment Scams: Fake at-home testing kits, door-to-door testing for money or ID theft, phony product cures, vaccines, and unproven treatments for COVID-19.

Supply scams: Using websites, social media accounts, and email scammers offer to sell medical supplies like surgical masks. Crooks keep the cash and don't deliver the goods.

Provider scams: Pretending to be doctors and hospitals that have treated a friend or relative for COVID-19, crooks call or email demanding payment for that treatment.

Phishing scams: Posing as national and global health authorities including the CDC, WHO, and local agencies, scammers are sending emails and texts that trick recipients into downloading malware or providing personal identifying and financial information.

App scams: Creating and manipulating mobile apps to track the spread of COVID-19 and insert malware that will compromise users' devices and steal personal information.

Investment scams: Online promotions, including social media, claiming products or services of publicly traded companies can prevent, detect, or cure COVID-19.

To learn more about COVID-19 scams and tips to avoid them visit the [Federal Trade Commission](#), [FBI](#), and [US Attorney](#). To report COVID-19 scams visit [US Department of Justice website](#) for links.

*Sources FTC, Oregon U.S.A., FBI

CORONAVIRUS GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE

The Federal Government recently passed the [Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#) that provides financial assistance to individuals, families, and businesses affected by the outbreak of COVID-19 ([FAQ US Dept Labor](#)). Knowing how to apply for and obtain government assistance can be confusing and that's where scammers step in. Using fake websites, social media accounts, phishing emails, texts, and more, these criminals target victims, especially seniors, into giving up their cash or personal info with promises of free money. Fake Government Grant scams have been around for years, and they're now being modified to exploit the COVID-19 crisis. **The U.S. Federal Government doesn't offer grants (free money) to individuals period.** Anyone claiming they do is a scammer.

How to get real help now. [USA.gov](#) offers federal benefit programs designed to [assist individuals and families in need to become self-sufficient](#) or [lower their expenses](#). There are also loans for businesses and individuals, including expanded COVID-19 assistance programs available through the [Small Business Administration](#).

Florida is offering assistance to individuals who've lost employment, income, or suffered reduced hours due to COVID-19 by applying [for assistance from the Florida DOE](#). They've also published a [FAQ document](#) to better explain available assistance. Business assistance is also available through [FloridaDisasterLoan.org](#).

Beware of any unsolicited assistance offers and always do your research before giving anyone your money or personal information.

* Sources ScamDetectpr, FDOE, USDOL, Grants.gov,