

US orders first shutdown of website over coronavirus fraud



The US Department of Justice announced Sunday it had shut down a website claiming to sell a coronavirus vaccine, in its first act of federal enforcement against fraud in connection with the pandemic.

Lawsuits had been filed against the site coronavirusmedicalkit.com, which claimed to sell vaccines for COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus, when in fact there is no such vaccine, the Justice Department said in a statement.

A Texas federal judge on Saturday ordered the site to shut down, according to the statement. Its homepage, however, was still accessible as of Sunday evening.

"Due to the recent outbreak for the Coronavirus (COVID-19) the World Health Organization is giving away vaccine kits. Just pay \$4.95 for shipping," read a statement on the homepage.

It was followed by a place to leave bank account information to pay shipping fees.

The Justice Department did not specify how many people fell victim to the scam, but the investigation is ongoing to identify who is behind the fraud and how much money was stolen.

The intervention by the federal judiciary system is part of ongoing efforts by US authorities to combat the spread of misinformation that has blossomed since the start of the pandemic.

Attorney General Bill Barr last week urged federal prosecutors to make stopping misinformation a priority and called US civilians to report all such abuses to the National Center for Disaster Fraud.

He also warned citizens against a variety of scams including selling fake treatments online, imitating emails from the WHO or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) intended to collect personal data, and asking for donations for imaginary organizations.

Simultaneously, the US judicial system is on the warpath to combat price gouging of products such as hand sanitizer or hygienic masks.

More than 33,000 people have been infected by the coronavirus in the US, and 416 have died, according to a tracker managed by Johns Hopkins University.

Collected from The Daily Star