

Scams Involving Impersonation of Federal and State Officials

Q: I received a telephone call/email/letter from an individual claiming to work for the Board of Veterinary Medicine, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), or the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), but I think it was a scam. What information and advice can the Board provide?

A: Minnesota-licensed health care professionals who received such calls, letters or emails have contacted their Board, as well as DEA and FDA officers.

The caller or writer often (but not always) identifies himself/herself as an employee or “agent” of the Board, sometimes giving a name, which often is not the name of anyone employed by the Board), or as an agent of the FDA or DEA.

States that:

- the clinic, hospital or licensed health care professional is under investigation for an unspecified reason, or
- a prescriber is being investigated and the help of the clinic, pharmacy, or licensed health professional is needed.

Has some information, such as the license number of the health care professional, pharmacy or clinic. Note: By law, license numbers are public information and can be obtained by anyone through the Board’s online license verification system.

Asks for information such as:

- the personal/home telephone number of the health care professional
- the DEA registration number for the prescriber

If you receive any call, email or letter from someone who claims to be representing the Board, the FDA, or the DEA - and you have any suspicions, we recommend that you:

1. Do not provide any requested information.
2. Tell the caller that you will be contacting the Board or federal agency to confirm the legitimacy of the call. If contacted by email, inform the contact person similarly.
3. Write down information such as:
 - any name given to you by the caller
 - the telephone number, email address or postal address of the person that contacts you
 - what information the person was trying to obtain
4. Call or e-mail the Board to verify if the call was legitimate and, if it was a scam, to provide the information mentioned above. In addition or alternatively, contact the DEA or FDA as described below.
5. Consider filing a police report.

The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) has warned health care providers and members of the public of fraudulent phone calls attempting to extort money. Though the tactics change regularly, the callers typically claim to represent DEA and provide either fake names and badge numbers, or the names of well-known senior officials with DEA. The scammers then threaten legal action against the victim, including arrest, unless large fines are paid by wire transfer. In late 2019, the scammers appeared to be spoofing a DEA number based out of Salt Lake City, UT, according to a DEA press release. The agency emphasizes that DEA will never contact practitioners by phone to demand money or any form of payment. DEA will not request any personal or sensitive information by phone, and notification of a legitimate investigation or legal action is always made via official letter or in person.

DEA asks anyone who receives a call from a person purporting to be a DEA special agent or other law enforcement official asking for money to refuse the demand and report the threat using the online form or by calling 877-792-2873. Reporting these calls will assist DEA in investigating and stopping this activity. The FDA would like individuals who believe they are being scammed in this manner to reach out to their Office of Internal Affairs, Office of Criminal Investigations at: Contact.OIA@fda.hhs.gov.

Q. What are the Health-Licensing Boards doing about these scams?

A. Professionals from many Minnesota health professions have reported these illegal ploys to their respective health licensing board. These boards are acknowledging the reports and then relaying them to the Office of the Attorney General where the reports are reviewed. Warnings to the licensed health professionals have been posted on their websites and been sent out via email. Licensees and their staff are encouraged to contact the Board should any suspicious communication be received.