

Romance Scams Are On The Rise During Pandemic (Houston Chronicle)

Last year, people lost more than \$200 million to romance scams, and this year could be even worse, the [Federal Trade Commission](#) reports. The coronavirus pandemic has most of the nation at home, and people are communicating online even more than before, leaving people more susceptible to romance scams.

According to [Plains National Bank](#), "Recently, the threat posed by coronavirus has ignited an international health emergency. That's when scammers will attempt to make your fear and concern work to their benefit with coronavirus scams."

"The main increase is because of the isolation. People are at home, using social media and dating sites to communicate with other people," said Denise Owens, fraud department manager at Plains Capital Bank.

The [FBI](#) reported that "romance scams occur when a criminal adopts a fake online identity to gain affection and trust. The scammer then uses the illusion of a romantic or close relationship to manipulate or steal from the victim."

Scammers have the intention of building quick relationships and gaining trust. Eventually, the criminals will ask for money. Because of COVID-19, some scammers are desperate for funds because they're suffering from unemployment, or medical emergencies related to COVID. They might even bring up the idea of "marriage and make plans to meet in person," according to the FBI, but the likelihood of either happening is implausible.

"We've seen an increase in fraud during the pandemic, particularly romance scams," Owens told Chron.com. "I would say we've seen an increase of 35 to 40 percent increase in these scams since the pandemic began."

Owens says that romance scams are harder to investigate because of emotions involved.

"In normal circumstances, people would probably see red flags. It's very challenging," Owens said. "We've had customers who believe that they're engaged to people in different countries."

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Banks and other financial institutions tell individuals to be vigilant in these situations, as after the crime happens, the deed is done. Owens encourages customers to push back, ask questions, and be aware of blatant red flags.

"A big red flag is a fraudster telling victims to not speak with the bank," Owens said. "What some people don't understand is that if these checks or fraudulent activity overdrafts the account, the victims are still responsible for that loss. Once the money is gone, it's almost impossible to recover," Owens said.

I think everyone should always use caution. If something seems too good to be true, it probably is.

If you want to learn more about how to avoid a romance scam, Plains Capital Bank has multiple resources on its [website](#).