

# Press release: HMRC issues Christmas warning about iTunes gift card scam

HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) is today (20 December 2017) warning the public about a high-profile phone scam that is conning vulnerable and elderly people out of thousands of pounds.

The scammers are preying on victims by cold calling them and impersonating an HMRC member of staff. They tell them that they owe large amounts of tax which they can only pay off through digital vouchers and gift cards, including those used for Apple's iTunes Store.

Victims are told to go to a local shop, buy these vouchers, and then read out the redemption code to the scammer, who has kept them on the phone the whole time. The scammer then sell on the codes or purchase high-value products, all at the victim's expense.

The scammers frequently use intimidation to get what they want, threatening to seize the victim's property or involve the police. The use of vouchers is an attractive scam as they are easy to sell on and hard to trace once used.

HMRC would never request the settling of debt through such a method.

The scam continues to hit a large number of people. Figures from Action Fraud, the UK's national fraud reporting centre, show that between the beginning of 2016 and August this year there have been over 1,500 reports of this scam, with the numbers increasing in recent months. The vast majority of the victims are aged over 65 and suffered an average financial loss of £1,150 each.

HMRC is working closely with law enforcement agencies, Apple and campaign groups to make sure the public know how to spot the scam and who to report it to.

HMRC's Director General of Customer Services, Angela MacDonald, said:

These scammers are very confident, convincing and utterly ruthless. We don't want to see anyone fall victim to this scam just before Christmas. That's why we're working closely with crime fighters to ensure taxpayers know how to avoid it.

These scams often prey on vulnerable people. We urge people with elderly relatives to warn them about this scam and remind them that they should never trust anyone who phones them out of the blue and asks them to pay a tax bill. If you think you've been a victim you should contact Action Fraud immediately.

Temporary Detective Chief Inspector Lara Xenoudakis, City of London Police,

said:

Fraudsters perceive the elderly and vulnerable as easy targets, so we are urging people to be wary of HMRC-related frauds to protect themselves, family members and friends.

We have received an increasing number of reports in which we have been told that people are being asked to pay fraudsters in iTunes vouchers. People should be cautious of unsolicited emails, calls or letters and always check directly with HMRC to ensure they are legitimate before responding.

Chief Executive of Tax Help for Older People, Gary Millner, said:

Tax Help for Older People fully supports HMRC in tackling this particularly wicked scam. We have taken too many calls from people who have fallen foul of it. The amounts of money lost are significant for some, and the feelings of helplessness, violation and embarrassment are immense.

## **Recognising and reporting a scam**

If you suspect that you or a vulnerable or elderly relative has been the victim of this scam or a similar one, you should report it immediately to Action Fraud on 0300 123 2040 or use their [online fraud reporting tool](#).

Check GOV.UK for information on [how to avoid and report scams](#) and [recognise genuine HMRC contact](#).

If you think you have received an HMRC-related phishing or bogus email or text message, you can check it against the examples shown in this [guide](#).

Apple provides a support page reminding customers that iTunes Gift Cards can be used only to purchase goods and services on the iTunes Store, App Store, iBooks Store, or for an Apple Music membership, and providing tips to avoid becoming the victim of a scam. More information is [available here](#).