



LLOYDS BANK

## PRESS RELEASE

# FRAUD WARNING: number of WhatsApp scams has surged by more than 2000% in a year

WhatsApp scams are now the fastest growing form of impersonation fraud, according to new analysis by Lloyds Bank.

Criminals are increasingly turning to WhatsApp as their weapon of choice by impersonating family members or friends who are in difficulty. While only a handful of examples were recorded each month during 2020, the total number of scams reported as starting on WhatsApp had soared by more than 2,000% (a 20-fold increase) by the end of 2021. Victims on average lost around £1,950 each.

More traditional scams where fraudsters impersonate a bank, the police or an institution like HMRC still account for the vast majority of reported impersonation fraud, however the number of those actually dropped by around 14% last year.

The rate of growth in WhatsApp scams is another sign of how organised criminal gangs are always changing their methods, and the speed with which they can adapt. While banks are constantly evolving their fraud detection systems to try to counter these new threats, it also reiterates the importance of the role other sectors have to play in combatting fraud, with almost all scams now starting online, through social media or via a phone call or message.

### How the WhatsApp scam works

- Although it may seem like a very personal and targeted scam, typically fraudsters will send the same initial message to lots of different phone numbers at the same time, in the hope that they get a few replies.
- Once someone has responded, they will use the pretence of being a family member who has lost their phone and got a replacement. This gives them an excuse for having a different phone number, and means they don't even need to know someone's name, just 'Mum' or 'Dad' can be enough.
- The story they tell can vary, but most often they will claim that because it is a new phone, they don't have access to their internet or mobile banking account, and therefore they need urgent help with paying a bill.

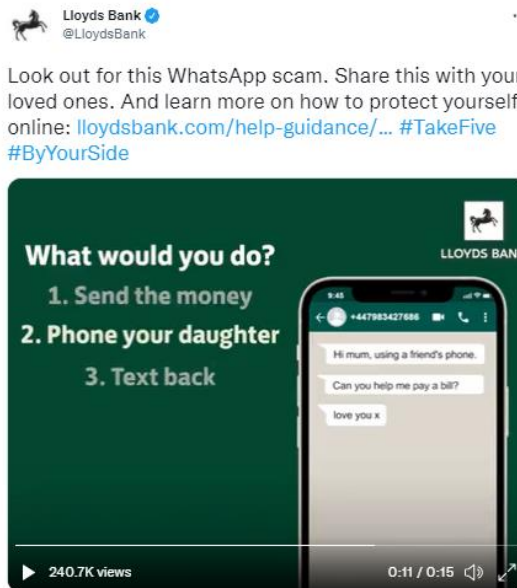


LLOYDS BANK

## How to stay safe

- Be wary of any messages you receive from numbers which aren't already stored in your contacts, even if it appears to be from someone you know.
- Don't be rushed into anything – first of all contact the person on the number you already have stored in your contacts to check if the story is true.
- If you can't get hold of them, you can verify the identity of the person sending the message by insisting you speak to them before transferring any money.
- Remember if it is a genuine family member or friend, they won't mind you taking these steps to stay safe.

Lloyds Bank has been running social media adverts to help warn people of the risk of this type of scam.



**Liz Ziegler, Fraud Prevention Director at Lloyds Bank, said:** “Organised criminal gangs are always inventing new ways to dupe people out of their hard-earned cash, and the emergence of the WhatsApp scam over the last year shows the depths to which these heartless crooks are prepared to sink.

“This is a cruel scam which preys on someone’s love for their family and friends, and that natural instinct we all have to protect those closest to us.

“With fraud on the rise it’s vital that people are aware of the warning signs and how to stay safe. Never ever trust a message from an unknown number without first independently verifying the person’s identity, even if it claims to be from someone you know. Always insist on speaking to someone before sending any money.”

**Ends**

**Media contacts:**

Lynsey Cheshire Willis: [lynsey.cheshire-willis@lloydsbanking.com](mailto:lynsey.cheshire-willis@lloydsbanking.com)

Gregor Low: [Gregor.Low@lloydsbanking.com](mailto:Gregor.Low@lloydsbanking.com)