

The New Zealand Law Society | Te Kāhui Ture o Aotearoa understands that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is presenting challenges for New Zealand's economy, including the legal sector and other professional service providers.

We are reminding lawyers to be extremely vigilant to the threat of fraudsters during the current situation. It is important now more than ever to be aware of online scams and threats as they are increasing in volume and sophistication. You should ensure your IT systems are secure against incursion and be very careful in any interactions whether online or over the phone.

Netsafe (New Zealand's independent, non-profit online safety organisation) has released some [guidance and tips](#) to help you and your business during this time. Netsafe have noticed an increase in online scammers trying to obtain personal information and financial details. They have outlined some signs to be aware of:

1. **Being asked for passwords** - legitimate organisations will never ask for the passwords to your online accounts
2. **Needing to verify your account or details** - don't respond or click on any links in the communication even if it looks like it's from a real organisation
3. **Unusual ways to pay for something** - scammers try to use payments that can't be traced such as pre-loaded debit cards, gift cards, bitcoins, iTunes cards or money transfer systems
4. **Asking for remote access to your device** - never do this unless you have actively sought out the service they are providing
5. **Pressuring you to make a decision quickly** - this could be to avoid something bad (e.g. account being closed, trouble with the IRD) or to take advantage of something good (a deal or investment)
6. **Contact that is out of the blue** - even if the person says they're from a legitimate organisation like your bank, health or internet provider

The best thing you can do if you notice any of the signs above is to stop, get some advice or look for more information. The Law Society has also [published advice](#) from CERT NZ around email fraud and the risks of paying via email instructions.

Vigilance in this area will not only protect your finances from attack but will also ensure the trust account and client monies are also safeguarded. You will be aware of the high level of trust placed in lawyers to protect any client funds that are held in trust accounts, and we know you will all make sure this occurs.

We want to reassure you that the Inspectorate will continue to operate via remote means during this difficult time and that we will do our utmost to assist with any concerns or questions you have around the operation of trust accounts. Please click [here](#) for a list of your local inspectors or contact the Inspectorate on **0800 542 119**.