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NIH Warns All to 'Remain Vigilant' Against Cybersecurity Threats

Cybercriminals are “sending malicious phishing emails that appear to be from trusted federal agencies,” such as HHS, in order to “steal sensitive data,” warned Michael Lauer, NIH deputy director for extramural research. “Other phishing emails have contained a link to a malicious website that was designed to look like a live map of COVID-19 cases from Johns Hopkins University.” Writing April 8 in his *Open Mike* blog, Lauer urged everyone to “remain vigilant and be ready to report if we see anything suspicious, and continu[e] to keep our work, data, and professional and personal lives safer and more productive.” Lauer pointed out that threats are increasing now that more work is being done from home and access to NIH and research institutions is occurring with “internet tools more and more, challenging the safety and security of these electronic systems likely to a degree not seen before.”

Lauer noted that “most of us do not pay close attention to cyber safety until something is clearly wrong. Even then, we may not see the impact of a cyberattack as equivalent to that of a physical act of aggression or theft. Because we do not fully understand or acknowledge the danger of cyberattacks, we may not take appropriate precautions to prevent them, even though those risks can pose a formidable threat to our research and ability to achieve our mission. In today’s increasingly digital and connected world, it’s time to shift this attitude.” Lauer added that everyone needs to “acknowledge the risk inherent in cyber and take a personal stake in our shared responsibility for ensuring that NIH stays safe from cyberattacks.” NIH plans to “post a series of essays on cyber safety and why it matters to all of us,” Lauer said, and he recommended viewing a Department of Homeland Security website for tips on cybersecurity.

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