

How To Keep Your Computer Virus Free

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As you are aware, vandals are at work creating new computer viruses all the time. We mostly hear about the big, awful, scary viruses on the news and we hurry to take the appropriate action, but the large majority of infections are quiet and anonymous. We should give these little termites no less attention as often time they are doing much damage before they are even detected. Their effects run from mostly benign to potentially fatal to their unwilling and unwitting hosts. There are two different approaches to dealing with them: Prevention and Cure.

Preventing virus infection begins with guarding the portals of contact. Do not open suspicious e-mails or attachments without scanning them first. Most anti-virus programs have a right-click option to scan a selected file for viruses, which makes scanning easy. When you download software, eBooks or other items, always save to a file, then scan the file before opening. If you bring in data or software by floppy disk, CD or other portable media, the same rule applies; always scan it first!

Getting a good firewall can help in keeping viruses at bay, but there are too many ways to hide them in regular data or software transfers for a firewall to catch them all. A firewall can help, but don't count on that alone. Sooner or later, viruses are going to get through your defenses somehow, and you will need to turn to cures.

When and if that day comes, you could lose most of your files before you know that there is a problem! So prepare well in advance by backing up your files for easy recovery. Set up your computer with a small hard drive (4-10giga) for your C: drive and a much larger hard drive for all your data. Use your C: drive for programs only. Keep copies of your software purchase receipts, registration and activation codes and setup info in a file on your data drive. You can always download them again, if you can give the seller your purchase info to show that you already bought. Almost all virus infections will be in the program section of the C: drive, so scan it daily. This won't take much time since you have arranged for it to be relatively small. Then scan your (larger)data drive once or twice a month.

Back up your data files frequently. If you cannot backup everything, at least backup the crucial information that would be difficult or impossible to replace. CD and DVD burners are a good way to do this backup, as are removable hard drives. You require a good anti-virus programs to go after the viruses and either quarantine or (preferably) destroy them. There are many anti-virus solutions being touted and hyped out there. Some are good, most are not. Here is how to find the good ones:

1. Look for programs that offer both active and passive protection. Active protection means that part of the program remains memory-resident, actively watching for potential incoming viruses. When they detect a virus they can sound an alarm and give you a series of options for dealing with it. Passive or on-demand protection will let you ask for a scan of specified areas when you want it, but it waits for you to ask.
2. Select your anti-virus software based on the recommendations of independent testing agencies. Checkmark (by <http://westcoastlabs.org>), <http://AV-test.org> and PC World magazine are among the most respected independent testers of anti-virus software. For ratings of anti-trojan software, check with Anti-trojan - Forum.

Use more than one anti-virus and anti-trojan program. Very few detect all problems, but what one program misses, another may seek and destroy.

3. Keep your anti-virus programs up to date. There is a running battle going on between virus writer-disseminators and virus catch-and-destroy experts. New viruses are found; new anti-virus program patches to find and destroy them are usually ready within hours or days. Until your software is updated, you are still vulnerable to the new viruses.

Consider using anti-virus software on your personal computer, consider using an Internet Service Provider or e-mail service that includes server-side anti-virus and spam e-mail filtering as a third layer of protection.

In summary, the urgency was best said by Eugene Kaspersky, Kaspersky Lab Virus Research, in a November 23, 2005 article posted in Security News, said, "The number of new viruses and Trojans is now increasing every day by a few hundred. (Our) virus lab receives between 200 and 300 new samples a day." That is not a misprint. He said 200-300 per day so we must be sure to keep ourselves aware and make the necessary changes in a timely manner to stay ahead of these viruses. Be assured, it is an ongoing battle!

So, get good software, run it often and update it often.. stay alert to new developments! The struggle between new viruses and better anti-virus software is ongoing, and developing steadily.