

Virus Protection

By Richard Lowe

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Internet Tips And Secrets <http://www.internet-tips.net>

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One of the saddest things in the entire world is hearing the words, "I think I've been hit by a virus" or "my computer was destroyed by a virus, can you help me please?"

Every time I hear these words I want to cry - well, actually I want to scream in frustration and a little bit of anger. You see, it's not hard to protect your system from destruction by any one of the fifty thousand or more viruses out in the wild. In fact, it's so simple that it's pitiful that anyone gets caught "with their pants down" more than once in his or her lives.

By this time it's inconceivable that anyone with any contact with civilization is ignorant of viruses and their destructive potential. A few years ago you could claim ignorance (what's a virus?) but no longer. In these years after "I love you" and "Melissa", well, virus attacks appear on the 6 o'clock news at least once a week and in the newspaper just as often.

That's one of the reasons why I groan when I hear that someone has lost their system to a virus attack. They cannot claim that they didn't know or didn't understand. In addition, protection is so simple and cheap that no one can use the excuse of "it's too expensive" or "it's too difficult". Sorry, that just does not hold water.

Look at it this way - if someone is surfing the internet they must be paying for a connection (say twenty dollars a month) and they have to have a computer (perhaps a thousand dollars). It's hard to accept that they cannot afford another thirty or fifty bucks for virus protection (in fact, many new computers come with an antivirus program pre-installed).

All right, preaching aside, what's the best way to protect your system from virus attacks? To begin with, assume that you or someone who uses your computer might make a mistake and plan for the worst. In other words, make the assumption that if a virus is received, it will be executed, so make sure the things are removed or rendered harmless before you see them.

Define and follow a good backup plan - First and foremost, figure out how you are going to back up your data. Didn't expect me to say that, did you? You have to understand that no virus protection system is perfect. If a virus does get through somehow, then you must be prepared to restore your data and files from a backup.

It does not matter if you hand copy your critical files to a floppy disk every night or if you have the most advanced optical or tape backup system available. If nothing else, get a cheap ZIP drive plug it in and use the backup software that comes with it (you can get this setup for around a hundred bucks).

Don't even think twice about this - if you don't have a backup solution then get one, now. If you are not keeping a backup then you are living on borrowed time (this also protects you from system failures, hackers and other dangers as well). ALL good security plans begin and end with the backup and restore strategy.

<http://www.internet-tips.net/Security/Backups.htm>

Choose, install and maintain an antivirus solution - Personally, I really like the Norton Antivirus program. I've installed it in our office and in my home, and I have not yet found a better program anywhere.

There is far more to an antivirus program than just checking for viruses. All of them do that. What Norton does that's different is very important - it also scans incoming emails for viruses so they are removed even before you open the message.

<http://www.internet-tips.net/Products/nortonantivirus.htm>

Schedule virus updates at least once a week - More importantly, you can schedule virus updates to occur at regular (weekly) intervals. This is extremely important. Your virus definitions **MUST BE UPDATED AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK**. Otherwise, your protection slowly loses it's power to protect your system. This is almost as bad as not having any protection at all - because you think you are protected and you are not.

Scan your hard drive as often as possible - Use your virus scanning program to scan your hard drive for viruses on a regular basis. I've scheduled mine to scan every night while I sleep (the computer is not doing much else at that time, after all). This way any viruses that do slip through your defenses should be caught.

If you run Outlook, then download and install the Outlook Security patch (unless for some reason you want to use email scripting, which you probably only need if you are a developer). This will prevent you or anyone on your computer from accidentally opening an attachment which is actually a virus.

<http://internet-tips.net/Security/Virusoutlooksecuritypatch.htm>

Install ZoneAlarm Pro - Not only is ZoneAlarm Pro an excellent firewall, it is also a virus scanner. It actually scans files as they arrive on your system and tags suspected viruses with a special file type.

This will prevent you from accidentally opening an email attachment that is a virus.

<http://www.internet-tips.net/Products/zonelarmpro.htm>

Subscribe to several newsletters about viruses - It's important to become aware of viruses and the associated problems and risks. My recommendation is to subscribe to the following newsletters. They are all free and even a quick glance at each one will help you become more aware of what's going on.

Symantec AntiVirus Research Center Newsletter

<http://www.sarc.com/avcenter/newsletter.html>

McAfee.Com Dispatch

<http://dispatch.mcafee.com/default.asp?>

Trend Micro Virus Alerts

<http://www.antivirus.com/subscriptions/>

Additional Information

Backing Up Your stuff - Part 1

<http://www.internet-tips.net/System/backup00.htm>

Backup may seem to be a pain, but it's one of the most important things that you can do to protect your system.

Backing up your system is an essential part of your security scheme

<http://www.internet-tips.net/Security/Backups.htm>

Backups are extremely critical to keep your system secure. If your system is damaged by a virus or an intruder you have a way to recover. Remember, however, that you must think through and test your scheme.

Outlook Security Patch

<http://www.internet-tips.net/Security/Virusoutlooksecuritypatch.htm>

If you run Outlook and you want to protect yourself, you should install the Outlook security patch.

Products - Norton Antivirus

<http://www.internet-tips.net/Products/nortonantivirus.htm>

You need antivirus protection for your computer. Norton Antivirus is by far and away the best solution for the desktop.

Products - ZoneAlarm Pro

<http://www.internet-tips.net/Products/zonelarmpro.htm>

ZoneAlarm Pro is quite possibly the best firewall product for personal home use that currently exists. Highly recommended.

Viruses

<http://www.internet-tips.net/Security/Viruses.htm>

The most important thing you can do to protect your system is install a virus checker (also known as an anti-virus program). These programs will scan your system for viruses and Trojan horses and delete or repair them. There are several products including those by McAfee and Norton (Symantec).

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