

How to Secure Your Computer

Part I: Install AND maintain/update antivirus software on each computer that has Internet access.

Antivirus software is a MUST have in the Internet age. Daily, hundreds of new viruses are created and released onto the net to wreak havoc, and it's up to you to protect yourself. Antivirus software is the first line of defense for your computers and home network. The software is designed to detect hidden viruses in files, plus discover virus-like activity that may be running on your computer. Most antivirus programs will scan incoming email as well - this is the most important form of protection you can have, since many of the worst worms are sent via email. Once you have antivirus software, you have to maintain it by getting the latest virus definitions on a regular basis. Many antivirus applications offer features that will allow them to automatically check for updates and download them - not a bad idea if you think you might forget. If you choose to perform manual updates, we highly suggest at least twice a week.

Part II: Install and maintain a *software* firewall on each computer that has Internet access.

A good software firewall will prevent connection attempts to your computer that you did not specifically authorize. It will also warn you about programs on your computer that attempt to access the Internet - perhaps without your knowledge. When faced with the threat of today's "Trojan" viruses, malicious software, and Spyware, it's important to know that software firewalls give you more of an advantage than a hardware-based solution. There are many brands of firewalls available, some are even free - just be sure the one you choose offers the features described above. After installing a firewall, you will notice warnings about software on your computer that attempts to access the Internet.

The golden rule is: if you don't know what it is or does, DON'T let it out!

Part III: Keep your operating system and software up to date with the latest security patches/fixes.

Every day, experts are finding new weaknesses in software applications and operating systems that hackers can use to take advantage of connections and information. In response, software vendors will create patches or updates to their products to close these security holes, but it is usually up to the consumer to download and install these fixes. To give yourself the best defense possible, check for security updates on a regular basis - especially for your particular operating system. Many products even have the ability to schedule updates that will make things easier for you.