

Computers, the Internet & Viruses

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Viruses & Spyware have become serious problems on the Internet within the last 2 years. A **Virus** is a destructive program that can do a variety of things to your computer-- stealing your email addresses and sending emails without your knowledge, deleting data & programs, compromising security on your computer, preventing certain programs such as antivirus software from operating, often causing Internet, printing & other problems. **Spyware** is software that is installed on your system, generally while other software is installed. It is designed to gather information about you, such as passwords or other confidential information. Symptoms of Spyware include pop-ups, change of Internet home page, slowing of the system. Both viruses and spyware can disable your system. Unless your system is running the most up-to-date software for Virus & Spyware detection, there are probably some present on your computer.

Where do viruses come from? Viruses & Spyware can come from a variety of sources, almost all Internet related. Email is the primary source. Quite often the email can infect the computer even before you've had a chance to delete it. Sometimes it comes on attachments that must be opened. Viruses & Spyware also come into your system on downloaded music, when you install file-sharing programs such as Kazaa or Limewire, and when you visit certain websites. There have also been several viruses that used security holes in Windows, and entered your computer the moment you connected to the Internet.

We have removed viruses & spyware from your system. Generally by the time we see a computer, the problem has become serious & either the antivirus software will no longer remove the virus or the system has become disabled by viruses or spyware. It takes an average of 2-3 hrs (sometimes more) to remove viruses & spyware, and to make sure the system is clean. We also usually do the Windows updates so that the security holes are fixed, and we usually update or install antivirus & anti-spyware programs. We check your system once it is clean to make sure basic programs are still working, such as the Internet and Windows Control functions. But it sometimes happens that the viruses or spyware are linked with other programs on the computer, and when they are removed, those programs will stop working. Generally reinstalling the particular program will fix it. In some cases, the best fix is to completely reload the hard drive. This wipes out all programs as well as Windows, and so everything must be reinstalled.

It is possible to eliminate or at least minimize the threat, but it takes vigilance & effort. SaskTel is checking for viruses on email, and it is helping. They also have a system in place for removing SPAM (unwanted emails), and it works quite well. If you would like to set that up, phone SaskTel at 1-800-773-2121. Here are some general things you can do to protect yourself.

1. Be careful opening email attachments, even if the source is someone you know. If it looks at all suspicious, just delete the email.
2. Never click on a pop-up window unless you know exactly what it's for, just close them with the "x" at the top-right of the window. If it won't close, shut down your browser by using the Control—Alt—Delete keys together, and "end task" or "end process" on your browser (either Internet Explorer or Netscape). Be careful about the websites that you visit— you can be pretty well guaranteed problems if you visit porn sites or illegal or hacking websites. Screensaver sites also seem to be especially bad...
3. Downloading music is risky. Sources tell us that Kazaa Lite is the best program for that. Other programs such as Kazaa and Limewire install adware & spyware on your system. As well, when you download music, you are actually downloading files from someone else's computer, which may have viruses.
4. Don't download & install any programs from the Internet unless you need them--and know exactly what they are. For virus & spyware problems, the programs listed below are usually adequate.
5. Keep your antivirus & antispysware programs up-to-date! It is critical that antivirus software be up-to-date, preferably within 24 hours, as that's about how long it takes for some viruses to get around the world!
6. Right now Internet Explorer is prone to attacks by the virus & spyware makers, so an alternate browser like Mozilla Firefox could be used (until it becomes popular & the subject of attack!). It can be obtained from <http://www.mozilla.org/products/firefox>. But there are still things that only Internet Explorer is able to do on the Internet.

AVG Antivirus Software. We recommend this as the best solution for viruses. The Free Edition is available on the Internet from www.grisoft.com. Keep it up to date by clicking on "Virus Database" on the lower left, then "Update", then "Update Now". Schedule it to run once a day. On high-speed Internet, it will update itself.

Ad-Aware Anti-Spyware. Don't confuse this with "adware" which is the bad stuff. Ad-Aware is a program and is excellent. When you start it, click on "Check for Updates" and then "Connect" and download the latest definitions. Run this program once/week or whenever you suspect a problem. The free version can be downloaded from www.lavasoft.com or www.download.com.

Spybot Anti-Spyware. When you start it, click on "Search for Updates," checkmark the updates & download them, then check your system. Run this program once/week or whenever you have problems. It can be downloaded from <http://www.spybot.info/en/index.html>.

Microsoft Anti-Spyware. This is a new program put out by Microsoft, and it may well be all one will need to keep the spyware under control, but this remains to be seen. It can be downloaded from www.microsoft.com. It will update itself.