

Home Computer Security – How to Protect your Computer – (January 15, 2007)

Online Safety and Security

An excellent discussion of online safety and security can be viewed at:

<http://security.msn.com/>

This discussion only covers ways to protect your computer and personal information.

Protect your computer in 4 steps

Step 1. Keep your firewall turned on:

A firewall helps protect you by making it harder for hackers to access your computer.

Windows Firewall (Windows Vista and Windows XP Service Pack 2 only)

If you use Windows Vista or Windows XP Service Pack 2 (SP2), you have a firewall built in and turned on by default.

To learn more about the Windows Firewall that comes with Windows Vista and Windows XP SP2, read [Understanding Windows Firewall](#).

(http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/using/security/internet/sp2_wfintro.mspx)

ZoneAlarm Free Firewall is designed to protect your DSL- or cable-connected PC from hackers. This program includes four interlocking security services: a firewall, an application control, an Internet lock, and Zones. The firewall controls the door to your computer and allows only traffic you understand and initiate. The application control allows you to decide which applications can and cannot use the Internet.

Note: ZoneAlarm is free for individual and not-for-profit charitable entity use (excluding governmental entities and educational institutions).

<http://www.download.com/3000-2092-10039884.html>

Step 2. Keep your operating system up-to-date:

Install new security updates as soon as they become available.

To help protect your computer from the latest Internet threats, it's important to install new security updates as soon as they become available.

The easiest way to do this is to **turn on Automatic Updates** and use the recommended setting, which downloads recommended updates and installs them on a schedule you set.

Just say yes to Internet Explorer 7: IE7 is a clear and dramatic improvement over IE6; with tabbed browsing, increased security, excellent RSS support, better printing, and a cleaner interface, it's a no-brainer to upgrade from IE6.

Step 3. Use antivirus technology:

Help prevent malicious programs from spreading from computer to computer.

Computer viruses are software programs that are deliberately designed to interfere with computer operation, record, corrupt, or delete data, or spread themselves to other computers and throughout the Internet.

Viruses often slow things down and cause other problems in the process.

For antivirus software, Consumer Reports' top five picks are BitDefender's Standard product (\$30), Zone Labs' ZoneAlarm Antivirus (\$30), Kaspersky Labs' Anti-Virus Personal (\$50), Norton Antivirus (\$40) and Norton Antivirus for Macintosh (\$50).

If you're looking for a free product, Consumer Reports particularly liked Alwil's Avast! Antivirus.

<http://www.avast.com/eng/download-avast-home.html>

Step 4. Use antispyware technology:

What is Spyware? Spyware is a general term used to describe software that performs certain behaviors such as advertising, collecting personal information, or changing the configuration of your computer, generally without appropriately obtaining your consent first.

Spyware is often associated with software that displays advertisements (called adware) or software that tracks personal or sensitive information.

Protection:

Download Windows Defender. Windows Defender is a free program that helps protect your computer against pop-ups, slow performance, and security threats caused by spyware and other unwanted software.

<http://www.microsoft.com/athome/security/spyware/software/default.mspx>

For antispyware software, Consumer Reports' top five picks are F-Secure's Anti-Spyware 2006 (\$60), Webroot's Spy Sweeper 4.5 (\$25), PC Tools' Spyware Doctor 3.8 (\$30), Trend Micro's Anti-Spyware 3 (\$30), Lavasoft's Ad-Aware SW Plus 1.06 (\$30).

Plus, as a **free program** to run in addition to a paid product, consider Spybot's Search and Destroy 1.4.

<http://www.safer-networking.org/hr/download/index.html>

NEXT: Backup User information:

Now that the computer is protected, the next step is to safeguard user information. Back up user data to a second internal hard disk, CD burner, DVD burner, or USB memory stick.

Use Windows XP Backup or other backup software that can be found on the Internet.