# 10 tips to keep your computer virus-free

These days, most consumers know that they must protect themselves against computer viruses and worms.  News articles describe the destruction or inconvenience caused by malicious applications circulated around the Internet via email and other methods.  A few tips will protect computer users from these threats.

1. Install anti-virus software and keep the virus definitions up to date. Anti-virus software scans files for unusual changes in file size, programs that match the software's database of known viruses, suspicious email attachments, and other warning signs. It's the most important step you can take towards keeping your computer clean of viruses.
2. Don't automatically open attachments and make sure your email program doesn't do so either. This will ensure that you can examine and scan attachments before they run. Refer to your email program's safety options or preferences menu for instructions.
3. Scan all incoming email attachments. Be sure to run each attachment you plan to open through the anti-virus check. Most anti-virus software can be setup to check files automatically. Do this even if you recognize and trust the sender; malicious code, like trojan horses, can slip into your system by appearing to be from a friendly source.
4. Get immediate protection. Configure your anti-virus software to boot automatically on start-up and run at all times. In case you forget to boot up your anti-virus software, configuring it to start by itself will ensure you are always protected.
5. Update your anti-virus software frequently. An anti-virus program is only as good as the frequency with which it is updated. New viruses, worms, and Trojan horses are born daily, and variations of them can slip by software that is not current. Most anti-virus software is easy to update online with options to do so automatically.
6. Avoid downloading files you can't be sure are safe. This includes freeware, screensavers, games, and any other executable program - any files with an ".exe" or ".com" extension such as "coolgame.exe." Unreliable sources such as Internet newsgroups or Web sites that you haven't heard of may be willing providers of viruses for your computer. If you do have to download from the Internet, be sure to scan each program before running it. Save all downloads to one folder, then run virus checks on everything in the folder before using it.
7. Don't boot from a floppy disk. Floppies are one of the most common ways viruses are transmitted. If you are using a floppy while working on your computer, remove it when you shut the machine off or the computer will automatically try to boot from the floppy, perhaps launching any viruses on the disk.
8. Don't share floppies. Even a well-meaning friend may unknowingly pass along a virus, trojan horse, or worm. Label your floppies clearly so you know they're yours and don't loan them out. If a friend passes you a floppy, suggest an alternative method of file sharing.

9.  Scan floppies before using them. This is always important, but especially if you are using the disk to carry information between one computer and another. You could easily pick up a virus from an insecure network and introduce it into your system. Running a virus scan before launching any of the programs on the disk will prevent infection.
10. Use common sense. It's always better to err on the side of safety. If you're unsure about an attachment, delete it. Especially if it's from a source you don't recognize. If there are tempting animations on a site that look highly unprofessional, don't download them.  Also beware of strange links or unexpected attachments that come through instant messaging programs. They could hide malicious code.

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