

Computer Viruses and Spyware Explained

What are computer viruses?

Viruses are programs that people create to perform malicious tasks without the computer user's knowledge.

The malicious tasks vary, but commonly include corrupting or deleting files and settings, interfering with performance, displaying unwanted messages, sending spam, and changing settings so that the computer is more prone to attack online.

Computers that are infected by viruses are usually irreparably damaged, and usually result in substantial loss to business productivity and profits.

The term "virus" is used because computer viruses exhibit similar behaviour to biological viruses: they are programmed to replicate and spread from one computer to another with the aim of infecting as many as possible.

What is spyware?

Spyware is a program that monitors a person's use of a computer without their knowledge.

Spyware applications usually collect sensitive information such as bank account details and passwords, and then send that information to someone who uses it for illegal purposes.

Spyware can come in many forms. Most commonly, it is hidden in software that looks "legitimate" but is in fact fake.

How do I protect myself?

It is relatively easy to protect yourself from viruses and spyware. Some tips are provided below:

Install security software

Every computer should have good quality security software from a reputable publisher installed that provides at a minimum; anti-virus, anti-spyware and Internet firewall protection.

Such security software will help detect and eliminate viruses and spyware before they get onto your computer.

Be sure to scan all files and disks before copying or using them on your computer.

Use software from reputable publishers

Only download and install software from reputable software publishers and from reputable websites. This is particularly important to help avoid hidden spyware.

Check digital code signing certificates

Many software installers contain a digital code signing certificate that authenticates the source of the software and helps verify that the download has not been tampered with since it was released by the software publisher.

A message box is usually displayed by your operating system before code-signed software is run allowing you to check the authenticity of the certificate.

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