

# Internet 104: Antivirus Protection for Your Computer (Part 4 of 5)

Michael Devitt

They can show up anywhere, in e-mail messages, word processing documents/macros, or in files that are downloaded from the Internet. They may lie hidden in your computer's memory for months, waiting for a certain date or for you to activate a program they've entered. Some of them can wreak enough havoc on your PC to make Ebola look like an electronic case of the sniffles. They are computer viruses, and unless you have a program that offers some protection, your computer is a prime target for infection.

## Viruses: What Are They, How Do They Spread, and What Do They Do?

Simply speaking, a virus is a rogue program that infiltrates a program file or boot sector and replicates itself. Viruses most commonly spread when an infected floppy disk is left in a drive and the PC is rebooted, or when files are transferred onto your hard drive. They can also be spread by opening an infected e-mail message, downloading a shareware program off the Internet, or reading a macro file or other word processing documents. Without some sort of virus protection, you can send a potentially deadly virus to dozens of people without knowing it.

Once active in your computer's memory, a virus can perform a number of negative functions, including destruction of data files, corruption of BIOS settings; some even reformat your hard drive. For instance, if the Form.A virus makes its way onto your computer, several annoying things happen on the 18th of every month: unused hard disk sectors become damaged, certain keys beep when they are pressed, and the monitor displays a rather obscene reference to a woman named Corinne.

There are some 10,000 computer viruses that have been cataloged and identified. Of those, approximately 700 are "in the wild," or known to be in circulation. The Symantec AntiVirus Research Center reports that between three and six new computer viruses are discovered every day. That's why it's important to get some type of virus protection as soon as possible.

## Virus Protection: Which is the Best?

There are dozens of virus protection packages on the market. They each claim to offer the best protection available, but none are the perfect solution. There are three that stand out in terms of ability to detect and remove viruses, price, and ease of use.

One program that comes highly recommended is Dr. Solomon's Anti-Virus Toolkit. It's excellent for wild virus detection and removal, and uses a simple interface that provides every antivirus feature you need on one screen. Among the Toolkit's more attractive features is an on-screen virus encyclopedia, which lists every known virus and their effects on a computer. Dr. Solomon also comes with a bootable floppy disk which lets you find and destroy a virus on any system. The Toolkit has an option that lets you do monthly virus updates online. Trial versions of Dr. Solomon's Anti-Virus Toolkit are available for download at their website ([url=<http://www.drsolomon.com>]<http://www.drsolomon.com>[url]); the full

version costs between \$60-\$70.

Another good antivirus program is Norton AntiVirus 2.0. Like the Toolkit, all of the features you need to scan and remove viruses are listed on one screen. Norton AntiVirus also lets you download virus updates online, and has a Virus Repair Wizard that gives information on the type of virus being removed.

While it doesn't remove as many wild viruses as Dr. Solomon's program, Norton does have some other unique features like a scheduling program that lets the computer scan drives for viruses automatically. You can also program functions to have viruses removed automatically, or you can go through a step-by-step procedure that lets you see every anti-virus action being taken. Norton AntiVirus costs about the same as Dr. Solomon's Toolkit; you can download a 30-day trial version at their website ([url=<http://www.symantec.com>]<http://www.symantec.com>[/url]).

McAfee VirusScan is the least expensive of the three. The standard version of VirusScan has been seen selling for as little as \$39.95. There is a slight tradeoff for the value. The other two programs can detect more wild viruses than McAfee's program, but VirusScan is able to remove more viruses than the Toolkit or Norton AntiVirus. VirusScan is the only program of the three that's available for every major operating system (Windows 3.1, 95 and NT, DOS, or OS/2). Like the other virus detection programs listed above, McAfee also offers a trial version of VirusScan; you can download it at their website ([url=<http://www.mcafee.com>]<http://www.mcafee.com>[/url]).

Here are a few other steps you can take to stay virus-free:

- Set the write-protect tab up on floppy disks when you're not writing information to them. Don't leave floppy disks in the drive when you reboot. The most common types of viruses are those that spread from the boot sector of a floppy disk to your hard disk.
- If you receive a floppy disk from someone, make sure to check it for viruses before you download any information from the disk onto your hard drive. After you've checked the disk for viruses and downloaded the files you need, reformat the floppy disk. This will eliminate any chance of you getting a virus from that disk.
- Back up critical files and scan the hard disk daily. Some viruses cause damage that simply can't be repaired. Save the important files at the end of the day, label them, and keep them in a safe place. Another option is to use a tape storage device or zip drive, which save larger amounts of data.
- If your PC offers an option to choose the system start-up drive, change the setting so that it bypasses the floppy drive and boots directly from the hard drive. This will lower the chance of you getting a boot sector virus greatly.
- If you have an antivirus program, make sure you keep it up-to-date. Outdated virus programs leave you open to new viruses. Without monthly updates, new viruses could get into your system and run wild for days or weeks before you can catch them.
- Make sure your antivirus program checks e-mail messages that you send and receive, and files you download from the Internet.

If you own a computer but don't have virus protection (or if you're thinking about purchasing a computer), buying some sort of virus protection software is a top priority. If you can afford it, buy more than one. (Need a reason why? See the editor's note.) Spending \$50 or \$100 on virus detection programs now could save you thousands of dollars in corrupted files, unusable hardware, and personal anguish.

In the next article, we'll describe the functions of a computer's BIOS (basic input-output system) and how it can increase a computer's performance. Upcoming issues will discuss fraud on the Internet, and reviews of websites related to the movies and auto repairs. As always, your comments are welcome. If you have any questions or suggestions about this column, or there's a website or product you'd like us to review, please contact me.

Editor's note: Dynamic Chiropractic has not been spared the wrath of computer viruses, although our system is protected with both Norton 2.0 and McAfee's VirusScan. One day we received a file that American Online downloaded into a folder and opened before either antivirus programs had a chance to scan. By opening the file, AOL had spread the Concept virus into our system. We had to reinstall Microsoft Word 97 and reset the operating system's taskbar to its original position.

*Michael Devitt*  
*Huntington Beach, California*  
*Tel: (714) 960-6577*  
*Fax: (714) 536-1482*  
[Editorial@DCMedia.com](mailto:Editorial@DCMedia.com)

AUGUST 1997