Important Information on Protecting your Computer from Viruses

What is a computer virus?

A virus is a program that has the ability to replicate itself, and it has the ability to infect other systems and software. The only way you can get a virus is if your computer has contact with another computer. Contact to another computer is made by using email to share files, surfing the internet, opening a file from a floppy disk, or being on a Local Area Network. As you can see, it is pretty hard NOT to have contact with another computer.

All viruses are man-made, and they vary in their destructive capability. Some viruses are quite benign and do very little except replicate themselves, attach themselves to other pieces of software, or place themselves on any disk that they come in contact with. Other viruses are mildly annoying, doing things like popping up a political slogan on a pre-specified day of the year, while going about their normal replication activities the rest of the time. A growing number of viruses are extremely damaging to your system. Some will try to erase data on your hard drive, some will make it impossible to boot your machine, and some will just cause a lot of crashes and computer instability.

Macro Virus

A macro virus is a computer virus that "infects" a Microsoft Word or similar application and causes a sequence of actions to be performed automatically when the application is started or something else triggers it. Macro viruses tend to be surprising but relatively harmless. Since the Office Macro language is not platform specific, some of these macro viruses can be passed between Mac and PCs, which is not generally true of other viruses. A typical effect is the undesired insertion of some comic text at certain points when writing a line. A macro virus is often spread as an e-mail virus. A well-known example in March, 1999 was the Melissa virus. A macro virus can be spread through email attachments, discs, networks, modems, and the internet

Another common virus is the worm.

Worms are duplicating viruses and usually attach themselves to emails and send themselves out. This uses up your computer memory and can also shut down complete networks because of the added traffic they add to the systems. Most of the viruses topping security experts' lists contain mass-mailing capabilities and Windows infectors. Because of their viral nature, these worms spread rapidly and are hard to combat.

Did you know over 500 new viruses are found every month?

Even though you have anti-virus software on your computer, it does not mean you are protected. In order to keep up with all the new viruses, you need to continually update your anti-virus software. This is done by getting and installing the dat files. Dat files are just files that tell your anti-virus software how to recognize the latest viruses. New viruses come out almost EVERY DAY, so **it is important to configure your Anti-virus software to check for updates EVERY DAY!** For information on how to update your antivirus software visit the vendor's web site.

The most common anti-virus programs are McAfee and Norton's. Their webs sites are listed below.

- Mcaffee - http://www.mcafee.com/anti-virus/
- Norton - http://www.symantec.com

How to protect your PC from viruses

Breakdown and **BUY ANTIVIRUS SOFTWARE**. It is worth the money. Once you have purchased and installed the software, be sure you know how to visit the vendors site to update your DAT files (virus definition files). This is very important because new viruses come out almost every day.

Be careful opening emails

Even if you know who the email is from, be very hesitant to open attachments on the mail messages. It is the attachment that generally carries the virus program and once you open it that is when the damage begins. If you have a bit of uncertainty regarding an attachment **DO NOT OPEN IT**!!! Reply back to the person who sent it and ask them what the attachment is and if they recall sending it. If you receive an email from someone you do not know **DELETE IT**!!! Don't open it and don't worry about sending anything to them.

Good resources

Check out these sites for the latest and greatest on computer viruses.

- http://www.symantec.com
- http://antivirus.about.com

Hoaxes

Hoax emails are a form of viruses too. Many people don't realize that the reason people create a hoax or bogus virus warning it is not meant as a joke – it is meant to clog up the email traffic and slow it down. Just think, when you get emailed a virus warning doesn't it always say – email this to everyone you know – and generally most of us do just that! If you get an email regarding a virus or a warning, please research it before you forward it on to the masses. A few good web sites to go to for researching hoaxes are:

http://www.truthorfiction.com

http://antivirus.about.com

http://www.symantec.com/avcenter/hoax.html

http://www.snopes.com