

The top nine ways to stop spyware from infecting your computer

1. Make sure your internet browser is up to date

Older versions of Internet Explorer allow many different types of spyware on your system. There are several ways to combat this. First, you can download the latest version of Internet Explorer. The current version is 7. If your system is too old to run the new version of Internet Explorer consider the second option. Mozilla Firefox is a great internet browser tool that helps to prevent spyware because not many types of spyware is made to attack it. Now, the newest version of Internet Explorer is equivalent to the newest version of Firefox so it's your choice of which browser you use. The only difference is that some websites are only made for Internet Explorer.

Internet Explorer 7 is recommended for newer systems, but it doesn't really matter; however, for older systems we recommend using an older version of Mozilla Firefox.

Internet Explorer 7 can be found here:

<http://www.microsoft.com>

You can download Mozilla Firefox from the Mozilla website:

<http://www.mozilla.org>

2. Install anti-spyware tools

There are plenty of free ones, so if cost is an issue, start with these:

Spybot

AdAware personal

If you have the money to spend, then try some of the commercial products out there. Be very careful, however. There are Ad-aware imposters that are spyware-installing trojan horses.

3. Install and run anti-virus

Along with anti-spyware tools, you should be running anti-virus software as well.

Norton Anti-virus, McAfee Anti-virus, Trend Micro, Panda, Avist Anti-virus.

4. Keep your system patched!

I can't say this one enough. If you aren't keeping your system patched, you're asking for trouble.

5. If your browser asks you a question, take the time to read it, don't just click "Yes".

And after you read that warning or notice, if you can't prove that you need to allow your browser to do whatever it claims it needs to do, don't let it. When in doubt, don't let it do it.

6. Don't install "search helpbar" tools, except from trusted sources

And even then, don't install them. Odds are that you really don't need it. Yeah, it looks cool, but its probably not something you **need**. Stick with the golden rule, if you can't prove that you need it, then you can live without it.

7. Configure IE or Firefox to block pop-ups

Yes my IE using friends, Mozilla and Firefox will block pop-ups for you, and these two venerable browsers have been able to do this for a very long time.

8. If you install software, only use products that do not include spyware

This one seems simple enough, but I'm always reminded of a phrase coined by Robert Heinlein, TANSTAAFL (There Ain't No Such Thing As A Free Lunch). Sometimes the really cool free game that you just **have** to install on our computer comes with a little extra surprise, spyware. Recently we ran into a user that had to have their computer rebuilt 6 times in 3 months. It was always infected with the newest trojans and spyware, sometimes even the best anti-spyware products couldn't remove it. Where did all come from? The user installed it. This poor victim had a penchant for goofy games, the more the merrier. We know he didn't mean to wreck his computer, he was just a little too trusting. When installing software it pays to be a little paranoid. Sometimes, if you're not careful, you can do the spyware makers job for them. As a good friend pointed out "Even if you're client is clean, that doesn't make much of a difference if you're downloading stuff that isn't."

On that subject, its time to discuss P2P clients. Too many P2P products include spyware these days. Whats worse is that you probably do not need to use a lot of these products. Ask yourself this, do you really need to run that P2P client, on that computer?

Also, keep in mind that you have no idea what you're **really** downloading from someone else when using some of these clients. If the source isn't trusted, really trusted, then you might just be downloading spyware, trojans, or viruses. And as you probably already know, all that bad stuff is on the P2P networks as it is everywhere else.

So, if you really must use P2P software, then be sure to pick a client that, itself, doesn't install bad things on your computer when you install it, and be cautious about what you download from someone you don't know.

Thankfully, there are many P2P clients to choose from that do not include spyware. When in doubt, if the vendor won't say that their product **does not** include spyware, assume that it does. Yes, this might unfairly cause you to rule out some nifty P2P product that doesn't include spyware, but again, if you can't tell that they do not include spyware, its better to stay away from that piece of software.

Heres a quick list:

eMule, Shareaza, LimeWire,

9. Don't log into or use an administrator account

Set your login account to be a "limited privileges" account. By default, when you install Windows it will setup user accounts for you, and those accounts will have full Administrator privileges. This is a sure path to ruin. Administrator accounts have totally unrestricted access to every corner of your system, which something you do not really need to work with your computer. Its dangerous to run all your programs this way, which is exactly what happens when you are logged in as an administrator, every program you are running to destroy your system.

So, unless you have a specific administrative task to carry out, don't log into an account with Administrator privileges. Do all your real work under an account with very limited privileges, otherwise you make it easy for the spyware makers to take over your system completely. With limited privileges, the programs you are running, which might include a virus, trojan or new piece of spyware, may not be able to sucessfully attack your system without those administrator privileges.

Sometimes you may need administrator privileges, for instance, if you need to install a new driver or a piece of software, just log in as administrator, install what you need, and log back out. Don't stay logged in with those administrator privileges. Otherwise, you'll make it trivially easy for all that spyware to take your computer over.

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