

Computer Viruses

Grenfell residents have recently experienced a spate of computer viruses. The viruses have been disguised in fraudulent virus protection program which install automatically on your computer.

Fraudulent virus protection programs are designed to make money for the people who build them. These people are called scammers. Scammers use cunning strategies to make you unknowingly install a Trojan Horse on your computer. A Trojan Horse is a program which allows 'back door access' to your computer allowing the fraudulent virus protection program to install.

You can identify a fraudulent program by the words 'your computer has multiple viruses and the viruses can only be removed if you buy particular software'. If you really had a virus, your existing virus protection program will notify you of the virus and ask whether to put it in the virus vault or to remove it. Never click anything on a webpage that says 'your computer may be infected' or words to that effect as this will more than likely be a potential virus.

If your computer is running slower than normal, is crashing while you use the internet or email, if you have many unwanted pop ups, or if your browser takes you to the wrong page then these are signs you may have a virus.

Virus's have many ways of installing on your computer; downloading files from peer to peer (p2p) file sharing programs such as limewire, pop ups and advertising, toolbars, cracked software and even downloading screensavers and can increase your chances of virus infection.

A lot of files on p2p file sharing programs, such as limewire, contain viruses. This is because when you are downloading files from p2p programs you are actually accessing the file on someone else's computer. If this person's computer has a virus, you have a good chance of also contracting the virus. For this reason some people who are regular users of limewire deliberately put viruses on their computers so they can end up accessing files and personal data on other people's computers. For this reason it is much safer to purchase music from a trusted company such as iTunes.

Nearly all websites have some sort of advertising. This can be small ads on the edge of the page you are viewing, up to full page pop ups. If you are viewing a site and a pop up appears with phrases along the lines of "Your computer is infected" "Click here for your free prize" or "You have

just won" close the pop up window immediately. If you click as instructed, you will be directed to another website and may end up installing a virus.

When installing new programs many will encourage you to install a toolbar. A toolbar is a program that gives more rapid access to email or websites. If you have too many toolbars installed on your computer they will slow down internet explorer taking longer for websites to display. In addition, while downloading toolbars, a virus can easily be downloaded too.

Never install software from a company that is not entirely reputable and avoid downloading toolbars as much as possible. When I install a program I always make sure the toolbar isn't selected as part of the installation. This way I'm not installing unnecessary programs and I lower the risk of accidentally installing a virus. Unless you know what the toolbar does and it is definitely something you require, I would advise you not to install it.

Cracked software is software that has been illegally modified into the full version of the program. For example trial versions of a program generally last only 30 days at which point you should buy the full version of the program to continue using it. You can download "patches" from 'crack websites' which give you the whole program for free. Many of these websites have viruses that you will unknowingly download with the cracked software or patch. I strongly encourage computer owners to avoid cracked software and pay for the genuine product.

Another way that viruses are commonly acquired, particularly by people who customise their computer, is during the downloading of screensavers. Many screensavers contain viruses that will damage your computer and install unwanted software. You are at lower risk of viruses if you only use the conventional Windows screensavers as these are very safe.

One of the best virus protection brands available is AVG. AVG Free offers good virus protection but it does not offer full internet security as it doesn't include anti-spam, antispyware or a firewall. If you purchase AVG Internet Security you will be better protected from the full range of 'internet nasties' not just viruses. Consider virus protection software as an investment. It will cost you up front but is worth it in the long run compared with computer malfunctions and associated repairs.

New viruses are created every day, so even if you have an up to date virus protection there is still a chance a virus can access your computer. If you use these common sense tips you will lower your

chances of getting a virus. If anything appears on your screen that you are unsure about, if you think you may have a virus or if you are looking for a new virus protection program, pop down and see Josh at the Grenfell Internet Centre next to the library in Main Street. Removing a virus costs \$40 and AVG antivirus with full internet security is \$109.99 for one computer for two years. The Internet Centre has a new website at www.grefell.org.au/gic Check out this month's specials or catch up on a past Techtips article.