

## Is your computer secure?

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**P**ersonal computers are frequently attacked by unwanted software (malware) such as viruses, worms, spyware and Trojan horses that try to load themselves onto your computer without your permission. The best defence is to practise safe computing and to make sure that your security software is up to date.

### SAFE EMAIL PRACTICES

User carelessness makes it difficult for even the best security software to function effectively. Most of us have learned to ignore email messages from banks we've never used and from African princes wanting to share their money with us. But malware can also be hidden in messages that seem to come from friends or relatives.

### SAFE INTERNET BROWSING

Most browsing programs offer limited protection by blocking some pop-up windows, but some websites have developed ways to display them anyway. If this happens, do not click on anything inside the unwanted window, but try to remove it by clicking the browser's Back control, or clicking on the X in the upper right of the window. If that fails, you may have to shut down your browser or restart your computer

### IS YOUR SECURITY SOFTWARE UP TO DATE?

Until recently, I had used the McAfee antivirus program and had it set to update automatically. A recent article in *Consumer Reports* gave it a low rat-

ing, so I checked to see if it was up to date. To my surprise, it was 13 months out of date and had not given any warning that my computer was at risk. To check the currency of your own security program, click on its icon on your computer screen. If no icon is available, search in your computer's list of installed programs. In Microsoft Windows, this is available by clicking on the Start button.

### GET PROFESSIONAL HELP

I was lucky to be able to get assistance from my university's information technology (IT) department. With my permission, they were able to take over my computer remotely and install new anti-viral software and several tools that would scan my computer and repair any existing problems. The IT department in your local health region may be able to provide similar support. This article discusses some of the tools that they used.

### SPYBOT

Spybot ([www.safer-networking.org/en/index.html](http://www.safer-networking.org/en/index.html)) is a free tool that the IT technician recommended to check my computer for malware. It detected and removed a number of unwanted and out-dated items.

### CCLEANER

CCleaner ([www.piriform.com/ccleaner](http://www.piriform.com/ccleaner)) is a free tool that can check and clean up your system files, data files and Internet-related files. It can also check and repair your main Registry

file, which may be cluttered with bits left over from old programs that you have long ago deleted. In my case, it found over 800 items that could be deleted from the registry.

### MICROSOFT SECURITY ESSENTIALS

The IT technician recommended this free security program from Microsoft ([www.microsoft.com/en-us/security\\_essentials/default.aspx](http://www.microsoft.com/en-us/security_essentials/default.aspx)), but my computer refused to install it. This may be because I still have some undetected malware program that is blocking it, or there may have been some conflict with my existing security software. I've since read a review that suggested that it is not as effective as other free programs in detecting and removing threats.

### MICROSOFT SAFETY SCANNER

Microsoft has recently provided this tool ([www.microsoft.com/security/scanner/en-us/default.aspx](http://www.microsoft.com/security/scanner/en-us/default.aspx)) that scanned every file on my computer for threats. The full scan took more than 3 hours, but it detected several Trojan horse threats.

### AVG ANTI-VIRUS

After my computer refused to load the Microsoft program, I installed the free version of the AVG antivirus software ([free.avg.com/ca-en/homepage](http://free.avg.com/ca-en/homepage)). I selected it because it had been highly rated in a recent *Consumer Reports* article and a friend has been happy with the commercial version. My computer is now secure but runs more slowly at times.

### AVIRA

Avira is another free antiviral program ([www.avira.com/en/avira-free-antivirus](http://www.avira.com/en/avira-free-antivirus)) that was scored slightly higher than AVG by *Consumer Reports*. I have not tried it personally.

### THE BOTTOM LINE

After you finish reading this article, go to your own computer and check to see if your security software has been updated recently.

Competing interests: None declared.

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