

GUIDANCE

What is an antivirus product? Do I need one?

Detect and prevent malicious software and viruses on your computer or laptop.

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An antivirus product is a program designed to detect and remove viruses and other kinds of malicious software from your computer or laptop.

Malicious software – known as malware – is code that can harm your computers and laptops, and the data on them. Your devices can become infected by inadvertently downloading malware that's in an attachment linked to a dubious email, or hidden on a USB drive, or even by simply visiting a dodgy website.

Once it's on your computer or laptop, malware can steal your data, encrypt it so you can't access it, or even erase it completely. For this reason it's important that you always use antivirus software, and keep it up to date to protect your data and devices.

How do antivirus products work?

Antivirus products work by detecting, quarantining and/or deleting malicious code, to prevent malware from causing damage to your device. Modern antivirus products update themselves automatically, to provide protection against the latest viruses and other types of malware.

Which antivirus product should I use?

Antivirus software is often included for free within the operating systems that run Windows and Apple computers. **If you make sure that this built-in antivirus is switched on, you'll instantly be safer.** New computers often come with a trial version of a separate antivirus product installed (such as McAfee, Norton and Avast). You should note that:

- when the trial version expires, you'll have to pay (or register) to continue using it
- separate antivirus products won't always work alongside the built-in antivirus software and could even stop it from working completely
- with so many products available you may want to carry out your own research to find out which is right for you

How do I use my antivirus product?

1. When you first install (or switch on) your antivirus product, run a **full scan** to make sure your computer is free of all known malware.
2. Make sure your antivirus software is set to automatically scan all new files, such as those downloaded from the internet or stored on a USB stick, external hard drive, SD card, or other type of removable media.
3. Make sure your antivirus software is set to receive updates automatically.

We've also created [more detailed advice](#) on protecting your PCs and laptops from viruses and other kinds of malicious software.

Do I need antivirus products on my smartphone and tablet?

No, provided that you only install apps and software from official stores such as Google Play and the Apple App Store. You should also set your apps (and the tablet/smartphone itself) to update automatically. For more information, read our blog covering [antivirus for mobile phones](#).

What else should I do to keep my devices and my personal information safe?

Top tips for staying secure online

We have produced some advice focused on how you can further protect yourself and your personal information.

[Head there now.](#)

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