

Viruses Q. and A.

Q. What is a virus?

A. A virus is a small program that runs on your computer that can and will cause damage if left to run its course. It is usually hidden in other programs on your computer so when you go to run your program, the virus is then started. Viruses don't always cause damage. Sometimes they will display annoying messages bothering you with images, words or maybe they will display a message that the virus writer wants everyone to know.

Q. How do I get a virus?

A. As with people, viruses are "contagious" and you can not get a virus if you keep your computer isolated from both the internet and other media. If download a lot of things from the Internet, then you're at higher risk. Most people who have viruses don't know it, so they will send you a file and not notice that it has a virus. When you open the file that your friend sent you your system then has that virus. It can happen to anyone and getting a virus doesn't mean that someone sent it to you intentionally.

Q. OK. I bought Norton Anti-Virus. Does this mean I can't get a virus now?

A. No, you can still get a virus. New viruses are created all the time. It is possible that you will run across an undetected virus. Also, each anti-virus program comes with virus definitions. Or a list of new viruses in addition to the old ones. Generally, an anti-virus program cannot detect a virus it doesn't know exists. These virus lists are updated often by the manufacturer and it is important to make sure that you stay updated. Most anti-virus programs come with at least six months or more of definition updates.

Q. How do I protect myself?

A. The best way to protect yourself is to not share files with anyone. Of course this isn't very realistic though and so the next best thing is to get an anti-virus program. These programs run all of the time and can check your system for viruses. When you go on-line they can also check the files that you try to download. Both Symantec and Network Associates produce good products.

Q. Can I get a virus from software I bought at the store?

A. Although this is highly unlikely, it is still possible. The same goes for respected web sites such as shareware.com or download.com and others. Even Though these are respected companies, accidents do happen and it is possible that viruses can unsuspectingly get into their programs.