

Antivirus Software

Antivirus protection for your computer is a must-have feature. The Internet makes it possible for a new virus to spread around the globe in only minutes. Antivirus software is one of the single most important pieces of software on your system. While many new systems come with antivirus software pre-installed, it may not be the best choice for your needs and it most certainly is out of date by the time it's delivered to your home.

It may seem that achieving good security can be a daunting task. Fortunately, following the few simple steps outlined below can provide a good measure of security in very little time.

Install antivirus software and keep it updated. At a minimum, you should check for new definition updates daily. Most antivirus software can be configured to do this automatically. If you need help choosing the right antivirus software, the [Top Picks](#) provides a list of recommendations.

Make sure all necessary security patches are installed. Windows vulnerabilities are constantly being discovered. Visit the [Windows Update Center](#) weekly to ensure you have all critical patches needed. Viruses continue to exploit old vulnerabilities because many users do not apply patches regularly. Not only does not applying these patches leave your system at risk, it leaves your friends and family at greater risk as well. Remember, if a worm gets on your system because you failed to apply the proper patches, everyone in your address book becomes the worm's next target. Try explaining that to Grandma Ellie.

Use a firewall. No Internet connection is safe without one. Finding one that monitors both inbound and outbound connection attempts is essential. Firewalls are necessary even if you have a dial-up Internet connection. If you have broadband, your system is even more vulnerable to attack.

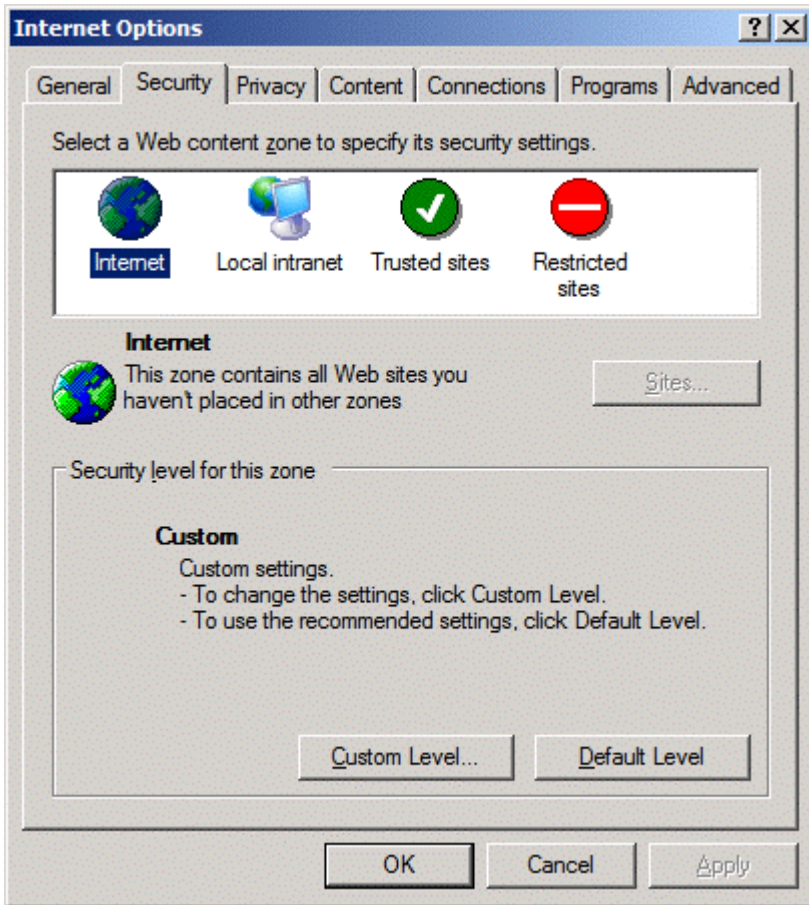
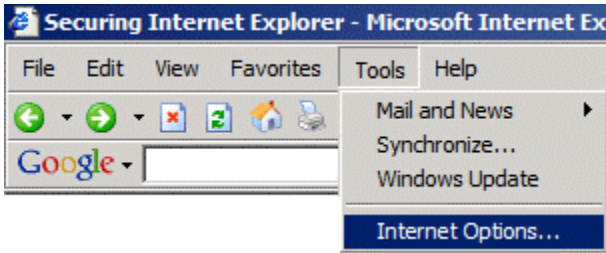
Secure your email. Make sure your email client isn't leaving you open to infection. Attachments are only part of the problem. Unless you configure it properly, apply the patches, AND exercise caution with attachments, your email is your weakest link.

Secure your browser. If using Internet Explorer, take advantage of the security zones settings to ensure optimum browsing safety. Not only will you enjoy safer browsing, you'll be able to eliminate unwanted pop-ups as well.

Annoyed by pop-ups? Worried about "drive-by downloads"? Has your Internet Explorer start page been taken hostage by an unwelcome site? Relax. Internet Explorer has a built-in mechanism for controlling the Internet nasties that threaten to ruin your browsing experience. Best of all, the modifications are free and don't require the use of an add-on pop-up killer or cookie cruncher program.

To begin, ensure you have the latest version of Internet Explorer and that all necessary patches and updates have been applied.

To access the Security Zones, open Internet Explorer, choose Tools from the menu, select Internet Options, and click the Security tab.



Security Zones

Internet Explorer provides 4 distinct security zones, each of which can be configured independently to provide custom protection for safer and more pleasant Internet browsing.

Internet - The Internet zone is the default zone for all sites not listed in other zones.

Local Intranet - Typically for local files or those coming from local networks.

Trusted Sites - Use the Trusted Sites zone for sites you visit frequently which require the ability to download files, play Flash animations, or employ active scripting.

Restricted Sites - Use the Restricted Sites zone to suppress pop-up advertising, minimize the use of cookies, or otherwise restrict the actions allowed by listed sites.

Each of the listed security zones (Internet, Local intranet, Trusted sites, and Restricted sites) can be configured to either a Custom Level or Default Level.

Internet - Set to Default Level (Medium). To do this, make sure Internet is highlighted, then click the Default button. The resulting slide bar should indicate the security zone is set to Medium. If not, slide the bar until it reflects Medium. This provides the best compromise between security and browsing comfort. However, this setting will not suppress pop-ups, but it will suppress active scripting and ActiveX controls that are deemed unsafe and/or are not accompanied by the appropriate signed certification. This is the role of the Restricted Sites zone.

After setting the Internet zone to medium security, browse the Internet as normal for a few days and pay particular attention to the behavior of sites you visit frequently. As you encounter sites that employ intrusive pop-ups or have other undesirable active content, make a note of those sites. Copy and paste the URL of these sites into a Notepad text file and save it to your desktop. This will serve as the list of sites to be added to the Restricted Sites zone. Do the same for frequently visited sites which may no longer function as desired due to the more restricted Medium settings. Create a separate Notepad text file of sites that are destined for the Trusted Sites zone.

Now that you have compiled lists of Restricted and Trusted sites, configure the zones for each of these:

Trusted Sites - Highlight Trusted Sites and select the Default Level, ensuring the slide bar is set to Low. Conversely, you can customize the settings by choosing Custom Level and making the desired selections.

Restricted Sites - Highlight Restricted Sites and select the Default Level, ensuring the slide bar is set to High. Conversely, you can customize the settings by choosing Custom Level and making the desired selections. To ensure maximum safety and suppression of pop-ups, all active scripting should be disabled for the Restricted Sites zone.

To add sites to either of these zones, simply ensure you have highlighted the desired zone, then click the Sites button. In the ensuing dialog box, type in the desired site's URL and click Add. To remove a site from the list, simply highlight it and choose Remove.

It is a good idea to periodically check the zone settings. If you find a site added to the Restricted Sites zone is not functioning as desired, remove it from that zone and it will automatically revert to the Medium settings of the Internet zone.

Useful resources

Information and reviews on antivirus software

CNET Central www.cnet.com
PC World www.peworld.com
About.com <http://antivirus.about.com>

Antivirus Software Companies

Symantec www.symantec.com
McAfee www.mcafee.com