

Keep Your Family's Computer Healthy

By Sharon Miller Cindrich

Q: My kids are downloading games from the Internet, and I'm afraid we might get a computer virus. How can I make sure our computer protection is up to date?

A: Families regularly download games, share e-mails and swap photos, so it's smart to give your computer an annual security check-up. Follow these tips to boost your computer's "immunity" against viruses, worms, spyware, and more:

Update virus protection software. Make sure you check the install date of the software—many programs need to be renewed annually, and updates may be available on a regular basis.

Turn on your firewall. Virus protection scans incoming e-mails and files, while a firewall protects against outside attempts to access your system. Many operating systems come with a firewall—make sure yours is turned on.

October is National Cyber Security Awareness Month—the perfect time to talk with kids about Internet safety.

Create a download rule. Make sure your family understands that downloading should only occur from trusted sources. Tell kids to ask first before downloading music, games or screensavers.

Beware of e-mail attachments. Never open an e-mail or attachment from a sender you don't know. Even Grandma can be a security threat if a virus or worm has attached itself to her e-mail.

Watch out for spyware and adware. Avoid downloading toolbars and graphics offered free through pop-up advertisements. These programs often contain spyware, can run undetected on your computer, and allow a third party to access your computer and private information. Make sure your computer's virus security software also includes protection against spyware.

Get more cyber safety tips at [the NCSA Web site](#) and in Sacramento Parent's [October online exclusives](#).

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