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 in 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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