

## Viruses, Worms, Trojans, Spyware and Hoaxes - What are They and How to Protect Your Computer. Part 1

Simply put, a virus is a program (piece of code) that is installed on your computer without your knowledge and against your wishes. It is generally self-replicating and consumes system (computer) resources.

A worm is a program very much like a virus with this one distinction - a virus will attach itself to other files or programs whereas worms exist as separate entities. A worm can spread itself automatically over a network from one computer to another.

A trojan horse is a malicious, security-breaking program that is disguised as something benign, such as a screen saver, a game, or some other valuable program.

Trojans are executable programs, which means that when you open the file, it will run and perform some action(s). In Windows®, executable programs have file extensions like ".exe," ".vbs," ".com," ".bat," ".pif," ".scr," ".lnk," or ".js."

Spyware is programming that is put in someone's computer to secretly gather information about the user and relay it to advertisers or other interested parties. Some freeware comes with spyware integrated as part of the package (e.g. KaZaA) - it is a way that the author or the company producing the freeware gets compensated. Not all freeware has spyware. The harm spyware causes is not

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just the invasion of your privacy, spyware uses YOUR computer resources to do it! This can be a source of computer slow-down.

Hoaxes seem benign on the surface. After all there really is no "xxxxx" virus, worm... However, many hoaxes cause you to perform unnecessary or harmful procedures on your computer - so not only has damage been done to your computer - you spent your time doing the damage!

So now that you now what to look out for - how do you look out for the above?

**First;** Don't open unexpected email attachments, even from know sources

**Second;** Use an antivirus program and make sure that is kept up-to-date. An antivirus program whose virus definitions are six months old is of little use. The two top commercial antivirus programs are produced by [Norton](#) and [McAfee](#). Both sell server editions as well as multi-user licenses in addition to single retail packages. Antivirus programs usually also detect trojans.

**Third;** Use a firewall. These are available as hardware and software. Enterprise systems need to have both, but small business and homes can usually do with one or the other. The most popular commercial software firewalls are produced by [ZoneAlarm](#) and [Sygate](#). While their primary purpose is to protect from intrusion - they are also useful in preventing a trojan on your computer from getting onto the internet or local network.

**Fourth;** Use antispyware and make sure the definitions are up-to-date. Two commercial producers of antispyware are [BulletProof](#) and [Lavasoft](#). However, I believe that there are freeware programs that are superior to the commercial ones. These programs will

check your computer for spyware and offer to remove it. Bullet-Proof will run in the background and prevent web sites or freeware from placing spyware on your computer. It is important to note that some freeware will not operate without its spyware components.

**Fifth;** Don't believe virus warning you receive by email. Check everyone of them out. Do a search on the name of the "virus" or use part of the message in Google. Choose a link in Google that is either to Symantec or McAfee. I think you will find that over 99% are hoaxes.



In our next issue we will discuss some freeware solutions for the above mentioned problems. If you don't have Antivirus, Firewall or Antispy programs at present and would like assistance in protecting your system(s), please call or email us at 303-679-1440 or [bob@rsblum.com](mailto:bob@rsblum.com) for immediate assistance.

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