

***I've just bought a new laptop. Do I need to install anti-virus software?***

***Kevin Albright***

The short answer: probably not, but in general it won't hurt to have the extra protection.

A longer answer: old-style viruses (which corrupt your disks, crash your computer and cripple missile defence systems) aren't the major problem –there's a broader class of computer nasty called malware, which includes little mini-programs that sneak on board as email attachments or hidden in websites you visit. Typically they're stealing personal information from you – maybe just your email address, perhaps something more critical like a credit card number – and sending it back to the malware's initiator.

There are three dangers in using anti-virus or anti-malware software: in rare cases they can affect the computer's operation, more frequently (but still quite rarely) they will report false positives, and most worryingly they can engender a misplaced sense of security – especially if you're subscribing to one of the update services. After all, anti-malware software is always one step behind the bad guys – those updates are necessary because someone has come across an infection.

In general, if you keep your browser and email software updated – and Windows can do this automatically for you – you should be reasonably well protected. And don't forget that no malware can leap out of your inbox or your web browser and infect your computer without some help from you –you have to open the attachment or run the script somehow. Don't click on attachments or run scripts, and your computer will probably be safe.

That said, AV software and anti-malware utilities will provide a measure of protection. Especially if you use a freebie, it does make sense to install at least an AV program and a malware sentry. Microsoft's Windows Defender is the obvious example of the latter: it spots and removes spyware and other unwanted software on your computer, which both protects you and stops the computer running too slowly.

As for the antivirus utility, AVG Free is the one I've used for some years now. It has found several possible viruses in that time, and I hope that it has not missed any ...

Downloads: [tinyurl.com/5q36co](http://tinyurl.com/5q36co) for Microsoft Defender, [free.avg.com](http://free.avg.com) for AVG

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