

# Protecting devices from viruses and malware



Following these steps will help keep your devices – and the information stored on them – safe.

For more information visit [ncsc.gov.uk/antivirus](https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/antivirus)

## How can my devices get infected?

An antivirus product is a program designed to detect and remove viruses and other kinds of malicious software from your computer or laptop.

Malicious software – known as malware – is code that can harm your computers and laptops, and the data on them. Your devices can become infected if you accidentally download malware from an attachment in a dubious email, by visiting an infected website, or using an infected USB stick.

Once it's on your computer or laptop, malware can steal your data, encrypt it so you can't access it, or even erase it completely.

**So it's really important that you always use antivirus software, and keep it up to date, to protect your data and devices.**



## Which antivirus should I use?



Antivirus is often included for free with Windows and Apple computers. If you switch on this built-in antivirus, you'll instantly be safer.

You can also buy a separate antivirus product (such as McAfee, Norton and Avast). They often come with a free trial but be aware that:

- when the trial version expires, you'll have to pay (or register) to continue using it
- separate antivirus products won't always work alongside the built-in antivirus software and could even stop it from working completely

With so many products available you may want to carry out your own research to find out which is right for you.

## Do I need antivirus on my phone and tablet?



No – but make sure you only install apps and software from official stores like Google Play and the Apple App Store that have been checked to provide protection from malware. You should also set your apps (and the tablet/phone itself) to update automatically.

## How do I use my antivirus?



- When you first install your antivirus, run a full scan to make sure your computer is free of all known malware.
- Make sure your antivirus software is set to automatically scan all new files, anything you download online, or transfer from a USB stick, external hard drive or SD card.
- Make sure your antivirus software is set to receive updates automatically.

## Keep all your devices up to date



Applying updates is one of the most important things you can do to protect your devices. Update all apps and your device when you're prompted. You should also:

- set all software and devices to update automatically, including your AV software.
- replace devices that are no longer supported by manufacturers with newer models – search online to see how long your current device will be officially supported