



INFECTION PREVENTION Computer tester Ernst St. Louis monitors a threat alert from Avira, a top-scoring anti-malware program that can be downloaded at no cost.

Security software

Free programs are fine for most people

NEW PCs **ALMOST** invariably come with a free trial version of a subscription security suite from a company such as Symantec or McAfee. But you can probably skip paying for those programs and still be safe online, our latest tests confirm.

Our evaluations, performed in conjunction with International Consumer Research & Testing, an association of independent, not-for-profit organizations, turned up free programs that should adequately protect all but the most at-risk Internet users from malware—viruses, spyware, and other on-line threats.

Consider paying for software mostly for convenience and some extra features. Those additions include a built-in firewall, which can block attempts by malicious software to access data on your computer. In our tests, the firewalls in the best suites afforded slightly better protection than those built into Windows operating systems. However, the Windows 7 firewall scored comparably to those in most suites. Even the Windows Vista firewall should protect you well enough, unless your com-

puters are often used by inexperienced Web surfers or you enable files on them to be accessed via the Internet.

A pay suite does simplify matters. It requires just one download and installation and a single upgrade to its database when necessary. Its single interface can also be easier to use than multiple stand-alone programs. You can use a suite on as many as three computers in the same household, and it will offer features not available on stand-alone and free apps. And almost all pay suites offer free phone or e-mail support or both. Few of the free programs we tested offered either support.

The extras offered by many pay suites include a spam filter and a browser toolbar that will alert you when you're visiting sites that host malware. But if you need a spam filter because your e-mail program isn't adequately filtering out unwanted messages, you can get a free stand-alone anti-spam program; we recommend SPAM-fighter at spamfighter.com. And there are free security toolbars available for all major browsers that provide extra protection against phishing sites.

Overview

We recommend running a firewall and an anti-malware program on your computer. You might also want to run an anti-spam program if the filter on your e-mail program from your service provider allows too many unwanted messages to get through.

CR Best Buy

These programs offer the best combination of performance and value. All are recommended.

Recommended

These programs stand out for the reasons cited below.

Ample, and free, protection for most:

A1 Avira CR Best Buy

A2 Microsoft CR Best Buy

A1 was among the best anti-malware programs, and it directs you to help. But it persistently tries to sell you its untested \$27 pay version, which adds some features. Less obtrusive is **A2**, which scored lower overall but was a little better at identifying Web sites that host malware; unlike **A1**, it offers support (via e-mail). Either program used with a firewall like the one built into all Windows operating systems, and perhaps a browser security toolbar (especially with **A1**), would provide decent protection at no cost.

For special protection or extra features:

C1 Symantec

C2 BitDefender

Both include firewalls that are a little better than those built into recent versions of Windows, as well as fine anti-spam protection. **C1** is one of the best products tested for detecting Web sites that host malware and for speed in scanning a hard drive for threats. It also directs you to help. But you must download separate software to activate its child and privacy filters. **C2** costs less and can work with non-Microsoft e-mail programs such as Thunderbird.



A2 Microsoft



C1 Symantec



C2 BitDefender

Ratings Security software

In performance order, within categories. (Categories designated A, B, and C.)

CR Best Buy
 Recommended

● Excellent
● Very good
○ Good
○ Fair
● Poor

Recommendation	Rank	Product	Price		Overall score	Test results												Features				
			Download	Renewal fee/Yr.		Performance	Ease of Use	Resources	Scan speed	Net threats	False positives	IM protection	Focused help	Firewall	Anti-spam	Can use many e-mailers	Child filter	Privacy filter	Browser toolbar	File shredder	File backup	
A FREE ANTI-MALWARE PROGRAMS Protect against malware.																						
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Avira AntiVir Personal 9 ¹ <i>free-av.com</i>	free	free	65	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Microsoft Security Essentials <i>microsoft.com/security_essentials/default.aspx</i>	free	free	54	○	●	○	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		
	3	AVG Anti-Virus Free Edition 9.0 <i>free.avg.com</i>	free	free	51	○	●	○	○	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		
	4	Avast! Avast Home Edition 4.8 <i>avast.com/eng/download-avast-home.html</i>	free	free	48	○	●	○	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		
B FREE SECURITY SUITES Protect against malware and include a firewall.																						
	1	Comodo Internet Security Free 2010 <i>comodo.com</i>	free	free	39	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		
	2	Fortinet FortiClient Endpoint Security Suite Standard Edition 2010 <i>forticlient.com</i>	free	free	25	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		
C PAY SECURITY SUITES Protect against malware and spam and include a firewall.																						
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Symantec Norton Internet Security 2010 <i>symantec.com</i>	\$70	\$55	67	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	BitDefender Internet Security 2010 <i>bitdefender.com</i>	50	50	65	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		
	3	Kaspersky Internet Security 2010 <i>kaspersky.com</i>	80	80	64	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		
	4	G Data Internet Security 2010 <i>gdata-software.com</i>	40	40	58	●	●	○	●	●	○	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●		
	5	ESET Smart Security 4 <i>eset.com</i>	90	62	58	○	●	○	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		
	6	F-Secure Internet Security 2010 <i>f-secure.com</i>	50	46	57	○	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●		
	7	AVG Internet Security 9.0 <i>avg.com</i>	75	56	55	○	●	○	○	○	○	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●		
	8	McAfee Internet Security 2010 ² <i>mcafee.com/us</i>	50	50	49	○	●	○	●	●	○	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●		
	9	Trend Micro Internet Security 2010 <i>trendmicro.com</i>	50	40	49	○	●	○	●	●	○	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●		
	10	Check Point ZoneAlarm Extreme Security 2010 <i>zonealarm.com</i>	80	60	49	○	○	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○		
	11	Panda Internet Security 2010 <i>pandasecurity.com</i>	80	80	39	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●		
	12	Norman Security Suite 2010 <i>norman.com</i>	60	50	34	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○		

¹ Avira has released a new version, Personal 10; differences appear minor and should not affect our recommendation. ² Ratings based on an older version than is currently on the market. In check tests of some key performance attributes, the newer version performed comparably.

Guide to the Ratings

Overall score mostly reflects anti-malware performance; anti-spam and firewall performance also considered for suites. Tests for **anti-malware performance** included capturing malware (viruses, spyware, and other malicious programs) online and pitting it against the product before the latest updates had been applied, as well as pitting variants developed in our lab against the updated product. **Ease of use** reflects installation, configuration, and day-to-day use. **Resources** is the load on PC memory, processor, and hard drive in

a virus scan. **Net threats** is how well the product blocked download or installation from known malicious sites. **False positives** is how completely benign threats were ignored. **IM protection** blocks malware delivered via instant messages. **Focused help** directs you to relevant topics. **Firewall performance** is against simulated incoming attacks; some programs send **clear alerts** when malicious software tries to extract data. **Anti-spam performance** is recognition of valid e-mail without tagging good e-mail as spam. Some anti-spam

software **can use many e-mailers**, notably with non-Microsoft e-mail programs such as Thunderbird. A **child filter** blocks access to certain sites. A **privacy filter** alerts you if you're about to inadvertently divulge personal information. **Browser toolbars** can be placed into popular browsers. **File shredders** erase files to prevent recovery. **File backup** programs periodic backup to another drive. **Price** is for a download (boxed versions are available for some) and includes a year of service for up to three PCs.