

# Spyware, Adware, and Viruses

## What are they and what's the difference?

**Virus:** A virus is a small program that is designed to hide itself on your computer, and then perform malicious tasks. The virus can attack your computer and cause data loss, or it can attack other computers and Internet websites. It can use a “Denial of Service” attack. This attack is when thousands of infected computers all target a given website and cause bogus web traffic, slowing down and stopping large websites like Amazon, Ebay, and others.



**Adware:** Adware is a program that downloads coupons and Internet offers to your computer, typically known as “Pop-Ups”. Every time these coupons display on your computer, the author of the Adware program receives revenue. A big problem of Adware programs is that they open the door for other Adware programs to install, greatly affecting the performance of your computer and Internet access.

**Spyware:** Spyware is different from Adware in that it does not produce Pop-Ups on your computer. Spyware is a program that captures information about you, either what websites you use, which people you email, or what username and passwords you use. Spyware programs can capture information that can possibly lead to identity theft.

According to the research firm International Data Corporation (IDC), 67 percent of all computers are infected with some form of Spyware, Adware, or Virus software.

## How do I get them?

Many tempting offers call out from the Internet. Media players, browser enhancers, or funny animation can all be downloaded with the simple click of a button. However, users downloading free software applications, or “freeware,” don’t often realize the potentially damaging consequences these programs can bring.

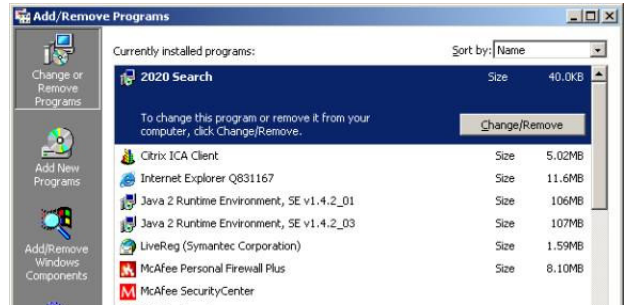
These programs are tricky! They generate a lot of revenue for the authors, who can usually hide from prosecution if they are based in a foreign country.



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## How do I get rid of them?

First, go into “Add / Remove Programs” on the computer’s control panel. Look for any applications that you don’t remember installing. The latest wave of Adware programs will be listed in the Add/Remove Programs lists. If listed, they can usually be removed with this method.



Second, use a removal tool such as SpyBot, Norton, or Spyware Services from Yahoo, Microsoft, AOL, etc. If these tools are not completely successful, boot the computer into “Safe Mode” by pressing F8 when booting, and run the removal tool again. Safe Mode will keep most programs from loading up automatically when the computer boots.

All else fails, reload Windows. If a computer is infected with multiple Adware programs and those programs have been running on the computer for some time, it may be much easier to reload the system software and have a clean slate than to tirelessly work at removing these programs.

## How do I keep my computer safe?

1. Education. Before you accept another free download, remember that you might also be gaining some new “spyware” with that freeware. It’s a trade-off you don’t want. Spyware is designed to invade your privacy and even steal some of your most valuable personal information.
2. Keep current on Windows Updates. Microsoft is continuing to fix bugs and security holes in its applications; these updates will reduce the chances of Spyware programs targeted at those vulnerabilities.
3. Install and use Spyware tools and Antivirus software. Great software is out there and available free for non-commercial use. These tools will inform you when a program is attempting to alter your computer’s configuration.
4. Watch for signs of Adware. If your computer starts acting differently, check into it. The longer you allow these programs to run, the greater the risk of having more serious problems.

