



What is a Computer Virus? What is Spyware?

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What is a computer virus?

There are several definitions for what constitutes a computer virus:

"A computer virus is an executable file designed to replicate itself while avoiding detection. A virus may disguise itself as a legitimate program. Viruses are often rewritten and adjusted so that they will not be detected. Anti-virus programs must be updated continuously to look for new and modified viruses. Viruses are the number one method of computer vandalism." -- Microsoft

"A parasitic program written intentionally to enter a computer without the user's permission or knowledge. The word parasitic is used because a virus attaches to files or boot sectors and replicates itself, thus continuing to spread. Though some viruses do little but replicate, others can cause serious damage or affect program and system performance. A virus should never be assumed harmless and left on a system." -- Symantec

Often, the first time that you notice that your computer is infected with a virus is that it starts to exhibit very strange behavior, such as:

- 1) Constantly rebooting itself
- 2) Running unusually slow
- 3) Generating an unusually large amount of network traffic
- 4) Preventing you from adding or removing programs or changing standard program settings

All staff and faculty computers at Rhodes run anti-virus software that automatically updates itself when new virus definitions are released. All students are issued anti-virus software when they come to Rhodes and are required to update the virus definitions often in order to use their personal computers on the campus network.

If you suspect that your computer is infected with a virus, immediately contact the ITS Helpdesk at (901) 843-3890 or helpdesk@rhodes.edu or use our [Ask Us!](#) page.

What is spyware?

There are several different definitions for spyware:

"A general term for a program that surreptitiously monitors your actions. While they are sometimes sinister, like a remote control program used by a hacker, software companies have been known to use spyware to gather data about customers. The practice is generally frowned upon." -- ISS.net

SEE ALSO:

[What to Do If Your Computer Is Infected with a Virus](#)

[Prevent or Remove Spyware](#)

[Configure Internet Explorer to Limit Spyware](#)

[MacOS X Operating System & Viruses](#)

"Software that tracks usage and reports it to others, such as advertisers. Usually the tracking is concealed from the user of the software." -- NAU.edu

Spyware is different from computer viruses, because you may have purposefully installed it to get a particular functionality but it also tracks your movements (without your knowledge or permission). Spyware is also usually not transmitted to your computer via email or a network infection but is something you either consciously installed or was inadvertently installed by your web browser because you went to a particular website.