

techtips

HOW TO AVOID SPREADING EMAIL VIRUSES

By Tim Moline

We've all heard about those new viruses like MyDoom and MSBlaster that have been wreaking havoc with the Internet and email systems these past few months. Many of these viruses propagate by hijacking your or your company's email address lists.

You can avoid propagating these viruses by deleting email that contains them without opening the messages or their attachments. While you can't tell for certain which emails contain viruses, you can follow a few simple rules that will help you identify likely carriers.

Most (though not all) of these emails include attachments. Infection starts when a user opens what appears to be an email from a friend, coworker, or relative. The subject line reads something like "I love you," "Haven't heard from you for a while," or "Hello." You may also receive virus-carrying email from people you do not know. These emails often have suspicious or overly familiar subject lines.

As a rule of thumb, email from people I don't know gets deleted. I also delete email from those I do know if the email contains an attachment and has a subject line that doesn't seem quite right. If the message was important, the sender will contact me again!

In Microsoft *Outlook* you can easily preview the first few lines of each email you receive. Click on "View" and then select "AutoPreview." This will allow you to safely see the first three lines of a new email without actually opening it. I do not use the "Preview Pane" that opens each email automatically.

In today's Internet world we all must be a bit suspicious of email from people we do not know or from people we would not expect to hear from. The easiest way for viruses to propagate is by unsuspecting users automatically opening email messages and their attachments without taking a moment to think. Once an attachment is opened it can harvest address lists and send itself to everyone on them using your name!

The key words for email and Internet users are "Be alert!"

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