

# The Effects of Spyware

## REMOVAL & PREVENTION

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**Spyware (definition):** The Anti-Spyware Coalition (a group of companies that include EarthLink, Microsoft, and Hewlett-Packard) have recently published a document that defines spyware as such:

*“Spyware impairs users’ control over material changes that affect their user experience, privacy or system security; use of their system resources, including what programs are installed on their computers; or collection, use and distribution of their personal or otherwise sensitive information”*

### How does Spyware get on your computer?

The user is the #1 cause of spyware! Some examples are downloading programs for emoticons and cursor affects, most of which Are free, include attached or embedded spyware, pop-ups that claim to be software updates or needed to view the page and website visits.

### SECURITY RISK : What will Spyware do to my computer and information?

Spyware programs are unstable. They cause your computer to run slower, certain programs stop working, and on occasion, you see the dreaded “blue screen of death”. Consider the time Spyware eats up, taking you away from other important issues – it kills productivity in the office and at home!

- Record keystrokes (usernames, passwords, email, phone number, physical address, name, credit card number, etc.)
- Read your files
- Watch your word processing program
- Change your internet home page
- Add and delete files and toolbars
- Read your cookies
- Crash your browser
- Barrage of Pop-Up Advertisements (on and off the web) with adult content, scams and links to questionable sites
- Random Error Messages
- They can update themselves leading to more and worse malware!

### What can YOU (the user) do?

There are several good “spyware removal” programs available. Here are a couple we suggest:

- Norton Anti-Virus
- Malwarebytes Anti-Malware

But be warned! There are a number of programs that claim to be anti-spyware that do not work, or worse add more spyware to your system! A good resource for “suspect” spyware is the list at:

[http://www.spywarewarrior.com/rogue\\_anti-spyware.htm](http://www.spywarewarrior.com/rogue_anti-spyware.htm)

### Lower your risk of Spyware Infection

Spyware is here to stay. Your best bet is to be informed – know the tricks used by spyware to load itself.

- Verify that your Internet Explorer security settings are set correctly or use an alternative browser (Mozilla Suite, Firefox, Opera)
- Use anti-virus and anti-spyware software and a firewall and update them regularly.

- Update your operating system and Web browser regularly
- Understand exactly what new programs will install on your innocent computer (many free programs aren't so free) and only download programs and software from sites you know and trust.
- Don't click on links in spam or pop-ups, even if they claim to offer anti-spyware software!!! Sometimes even clicking the "X" leads to spyware infections. Instead, hit the "Esc" key.

### **Sometimes All Else Fails**

InfoPathways **STRONGLY** recommends that you back up your data. Even the safest computer user can become a victim. If you think your computer might have spyware on it, immediately stop shopping, banking, or doing any other online activity that involves user names, passwords, or other sensitive information. Confirm that your security software is active and current and run it to scan your computer for viruses and spyware, deleting anything the program identifies as a problem.