

# THE GREAT DEBATE:

## Free or paid?



Is paid antivirus essential for critical infrastructure protection, or is free antivirus enough against evolving threats?

In the ever-evolving landscape of cybersecurity, the debate between free and paid antivirus software remains a pivotal point of contention. The allure of acquiring protection at no cost is undeniably appealing, especially at a time when economic pressures and rising costs affect us all. However, the question that persists is whether one can genuinely rely on a free antivirus program to safeguard their valuable data.

In adopting a "prevention first" approach, we delve into the nuances of free and paid antivirus solutions, exploring the strengths and limitations of each. We'll review how free antivirus programs provide basic safeguards against malware and fraudulent websites, while paid antivirus solution brings a higher level of assurance against emerging threats, ransomware attacks, and phishing attempts.

**“Why should I pay for antivirus software when I can get protection for free?”**

When you're thinking about internet security, that's one of the first questions to consider.

As you may know, many well-known antivirus vendors offer a free version of their software. And many of these products receive good reviews.

In fact, PCMag recently published an article on the best free antivirus (AV) software of 2023, citing reports from independent test labs as one measure of quality.

At a time when rising prices and inflation are impacting just about everyone, the prospect of getting something for nothing is undeniably appealing.

But the question remains: Can you trust a free AV program to protect your home or business computers and data?

# FREE ANTIVIRUS

## What you get

With no-cost antivirus, you generally get a streamlined version of the paid product. Both the free and the paid products will usually feature the same malware-detection technology. However, you'll see a big difference between the tools and technologies offered by the two.

The top-rated free products generally include:

- Basic malware detection/prevention
- Protection against fraudulent websites
- Notifications of outdated apps

## What you don't get

One major disadvantage is that most vendors don't update their free products nearly as often as their paid versions. This means you can be exposed to the latest malware making the rounds and to vulnerabilities that haven't been patched.



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*Free AV is like a windbreaker, and paid AV is like a heavy winter coat. You don't know you need it until the storm hits, but then you'll be happy to have it.*

## According to Security.org, here are the typical limitations of free AV software:

- No behavior-based scanning
- Protection for only one computer or device
- Lack of availability for some operating systems
- Infrequent virus definition updates
- No firewalls
- The chance that your data will be sold
- Little or no customer support
- Fewer or no extra features
- Frequent ads for paid products

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# What you get with paid antivirus

With a reputable paid product, you'll have the protection you need when a storm hits in the form of malware, ransomware attacks or phishing attempts. And these days, it's not a matter of if but when an attack occurs.

Products for consumers and businesses generally come in different levels, from basic to advanced. Here's an example of what to expect with paid AV:

- Up-to-date protection against new and emerging threats. When new malware is discovered, the vendor will immediately identify and define it so it can be blocked. Free AV can take months to be updated, leaving you vulnerable.
- Reliable customer support, generally at no extra cost. Free AV often means you'll be handling all issues on your own.
- Regular automatic software updates are performed for you. Free AV may notify you about updates, but you'll have to do them yourself.
- Multiple layers of protection, with features such as two-factor authentication, password management, identity protection, parental controls, and encryption. Most free AV products block these options, offering access only if you upgrade to the paid version.
- An ad-free experience without interruptions. With free AV, you'll commonly be targeted by ads in the form of banners or pop-ups. You'll also be reminded of all the extra features you're missing in the free version, and then invited to upgrade to the paid version to access them.

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# A Secure Future Starts with Prevention

In an era where the frequency and sophistication of cyber threats continue to escalate, the importance of robust cybersecurity measures cannot be overstated. While free antivirus software can offer a degree of protection, it may leave you vulnerable to rapidly evolving threats. The investment in a reputable, paid antivirus solution not only provides real-time defense against the latest malware but also ensures reliable customer support and seamless updates.

By prioritizing prevention through a paid antivirus solution, you fortify your digital environment against potential breaches and intrusions. It grants you access to a suite of advanced features, such as two-factor authentication, that elevate your security posture. In the face of escalating cyber risks, the peace of mind offered by a paid solution is an invaluable asset.

Only you can decide what level of security you want and the price you're willing to pay. As security experts, we think 15 or 20 cents per day on a paid solution is a small investment for peace of mind.

## Why do you need internet security?

- Every day, the AV-TEST Institute registers over 450,000 new malicious programs (malware) and potentially unwanted applications. (AV-test.org)
- From 2009 to 2019, malware infections increased from over 12 million to over 812 million, an increase of more than 6,500 percent. (PurpleSec)
- Every 40 seconds, a business falls victim to ransomware. (CyberRisk Alliance)
- One out of five Americans has dealt with a ransomware attack. (The Harris Poll)

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