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# Avast Free Antivirus

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Outstanding

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Special Offer



**CNET Editors' note:** Ask, read, and answer questions about Avast antivirus and security software in the [Avast Forum on CNET](#).

## CNET Editors' review

by: CNET Staff on February 23, 2012

**The bottom line:** Avast continues to push the envelope of top-shelf free security features with hybrid update tech, file reputation analysis, and more. It's independent benchmarks are a bit weak, but more than 150 million people trust Avast to keep them safe.

### Review:

Looking to compete with both paid and free security suites, Avast wants to create a unified approach to your computer security. Long gone are the days of the quirky interface. Avast is accessible and robust, with an impressive list of free features and strong, though hardly stellar, performance benchmarks.

### Avast 2012 gets bigger antivirus cannons

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### Quick Specs

- Version:  
7.0.1451
- File size:  
84.92MB
- Date added:  
June 29, 2012
- Price:  
Free
- Operating system:  
Windows XP/Vista/7
- Total downloads:  
194,591,663
- Downloads last week:  
1,024,343
- Product ranking:  
#2 in [Antivirus Software](#)
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### Installation

Avast has improved its installation process so it's faster than before. It's not the fastest on the market, not by a longshot, but a standard installation took us about three minutes.

Some items of note during the installation that will come up later in the review: to avoid the new Windows 7 and Vista desktop gadget, or the new WebRep browser add-on, you must choose the Custom install option and uncheck those here.

Automatic installation of these features is frowned upon, although Avast does provide a clear method for uninstalling them. It's just not as simple as a check box that gets its own installation window, since you have to go through the Customize menu, which makes the auto-install sort of surreptitious.

The current versions of Firefox and Internet Explorer both block forced add-on installation. When you run one of those browsers for the first time after installing Avast, they'll ask you if you want to allow the new add-on.

On the plus side, installing Avast doesn't require a reboot, and using its uninstall tool we detected no remnants in the Registry or on the desktop. Avast has said that the installer has shrunk for all three versions by about 20 percent,

although it's still a large download at around 70MB for the free version.

A new Avast installation option, available only from the custom install menu, lets you sideload Avast as a secondary security program to supplement your main one. We're not big fans of this option from a security point-of-view, because it can bog down your system resources without actually making you safer. However, for seeing if you like Avast, it's not a bad thing as long as you remember to choose one security suite to go with.

## What's puffing the sails in Avast 2012?

1-2 of 6

### Interface

Avast 7's interface hasn't changed much over the past three versions. There've been some decorative changes, a darkening of color here, lightening of grays there, but the changes have been either lightly cosmetic or utilitarian. For example, there are big graphics to illustrate the more nebulous security concepts that only have an on-or-off switch. This may sound useless, but it's actually quite clever because it helps you visualize how one of the more complex Avast features is keeping you safe without bogging you down in jargon.

Highlighted with the familiar security colors of green for safe and red for dangerous, the

Summary tab gives up-to-date info on shield status, auto-updates, virus definitions, the program version, and whether the silent/gaming mode is on. There's also an unobtrusive ad urging you to upgrade to Avast Internet Security 7 if you're using the free version, and an option to connect an Avast account. (This is for the Avast Web management tool, expected to be live about a month from when this review is published.)

The Summary tab contains two submenus, Cloud Services and Statistics. The former shows you how Avast's servers help protect you, and offers a Settings button.

The latter is for those intrepid folks who're curious to see how Avast's shields have been performing against threats. It's where you can get your math geek on. For each shield, it tells you how many files were scanned and when, and presents the data in a concise graph.



Avast 2012 includes a hybrid update technology for pushing out security updates to you faster.

(Credit: Avast)

The scans live in the second tab, where you can choose and adjust four default scan types plus a custom scan option nestled into the bottom right corner. Real-time shields live in the third tab, and again the clean interface comes into play here as navigating what could be a mess of options and tweaks is instead dead simple. Shields are listed on the left, or you can choose one from the interactive shield wheel in the main window.

Click a shield to reveal a real-time chart of what the program's been defending you against, with a Stop button and settings options at the top of the window. Another button at the top takes you to the advanced settings for that shield, and links at the bottom expose the shield's history as a graph and export a log file.

The Additional Protection tab leads to the AutoSandbox, Browser Protection, Remote Assistance, and Site Blocking tools. Avast Pro Antivirus and Avast Internet Security users also get Antispam, Sandbox, and SafeZone options. The Maintenance and Market tabs round out the options. As you might expect, Maintenance is for updating the program, checking out quarantine (called Virus Chest,) and managing your subscription, while the Market tab is a new option for buying extra security components.

### Features and support

While these tools are clearly non-essential, and some of the prices struck as high--\$10 for a Rescue disc? \$50 for an annual backup service?--we like that Avast gives its fans a chance to stay in its eco-system. The Avast EasyPass, for example, is an Avast-branded version of RoboForm's premium password manager and is well worth the \$9.99 annual fee.

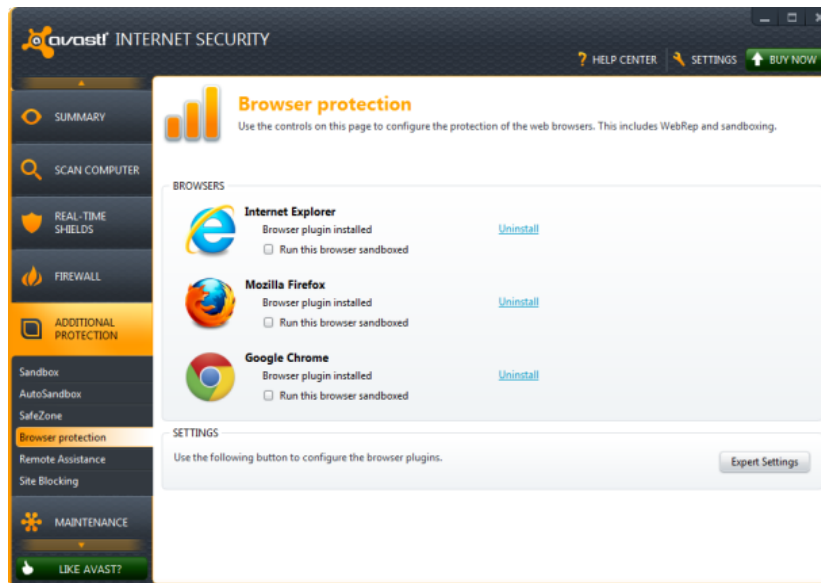
Avast 2012, aka Avast 7, includes several new features that directly impact your security. One of the biggest changes is a hybrid update technology that pushes out updates in real time. Because a full database update isn't required, Avast users will get their security updates much faster than before. Full database updates will also be pushed out, just not as frequently.

Another important security change introduces a file reputation system for evaluating downloads. This tech has existed for a couple of years in paid security suites like Norton, Kaspersky, and Bitdefender, but Avast is the first free antivirus to offer it. It leverages community data from Avast's enormous active user base to help determine if a file is safe.

Avast's WebRep browser add-on for instant Web site safety evaluation has been extended to work with Safari, and it will also now check for fake certificates. [Faked security certificates were an unexpected problem](#) last year, demonstrating how fragile Web security protocol could be.

In a half-day of testing, none of these appeared to cause any negative impact on computer or browsing performance. Assuming these technologies work as advertised, your computer ought to be a fair bit safer from malware with them.

And although we're more than half a year away from Windows 8, Avast has included some attention for the forthcoming Windows 8 beta, also known as the Consumer Preview, gets some attention from Avast as the suite includes an Early-Load Antimalware Driver (ELAM) for guarding against system-level rootkits.



Avast's browser add-on now works in Safari (not pictured), and paid users can force their browsers to always run sandboxed from a single checkbox.

(Credit: Avast)

The free version of Avast is arguably the most comprehensive set of freely available security features on the market. There's a reason these guys have more than 150 million active users (at the time this review was written). The antivirus, antispware, and heuristics engines form a security core that also includes multiple real-time shields. Along with the new features, it's got an AutoSandbox for automatically walling off suspicious programs; a full complement of shields that guard against scripts, P2P networks, instant messaging, and potentially dangerous program behavior; a silent/gaming mode; on-demand boot scanning; and a healthy output of statistics for the data nerds.

Avast's sandbox, by the way, automatically places programs in a virtualized state when it suspects them of being threats. It walls off suspicious programs, preventing them from potentially damaging your system while allowing them to run. As the program runs, the sandbox keeps track of which files are opened, created, or renamed, and what it reads and writes from the Registry. Permanent changes are virtualized, so when the process terminates itself, the system changes it made will evaporate.

The company hasn't said whether the virtualized state begins after the program already has access to your system, so it's theoretically possible that it could be compromised. There's not a single security feature in any program that hasn't been been compromised at some point, though, so "theoretically hackable" is true of all security features. The AutoSandbox will now advise

you when you're done using it as to how best to handle the program in the future.

The AutoSandbox for free users is different from Avast's paid-upgrade sandbox, and the paid upgrades to Avast Pro and Avast Internet Security include both the automatic version and the older, manually initiated version.

You can access the AutoSandbox settings from the new Additional Protection option on the left nav. It defaults to asking the user whether a program should be sandboxed, although you can set it to automatically decide. There's a whitelist option for programs that you always want to exclude from the sandbox, or you can deactivate the feature entirely.

In addition to these core security features, Avast has some nifty extras to help you out. The Troubleshooting section now comes with a "restore factory settings" option, which makes it easier to wipe settings back to a familiar starting point, and comes with the option to restore only the Shields settings, leaving other changes untouched, like permanently running in silent mode.

There's a sidebar desktop gadget for Windows 7 and Vista, and you can set automatic actions for the boot-time scan. Available under the Scan Computer tab, the boot-time scan customizations give you far more flexibility in managing the lengthy and time-consuming boot scan.

Meanwhile, new in Avast Free is the Remote Assistance feature, for single-instance, friend-to-friend remote tech support. Part of the main Avast interface, all the other person has to have is...Avast.

It's a good way to get others to install the program, but this isn't the only single-serving tech support option around. Still, in our tests, it worked fine. One person shares a code with the other, and voila! Instant remote PC access. Simply close the window to break the connection.

Avast doesn't offer an on-demand link-scanning feature, like AVG and Norton do, although the company says that the way that Avast's Web shield behaves ought to protect you automatically from any malicious URLs by automatically preventing the URL from resolving in-browser. A page will appear letting you know that Avast has blocked the site because it is suspected to contain a threat.

There weren't many big changes for Avast Pro Antivirus or Avast Internet Security users, but there were improvements made to the Safe Zone and Browser Sandbox features. The Browser Sandbox now lets you force Internet Explorer, Firefox, Chrome, or Safari to always run sandboxed away from your system. SafeZone now automatically asks you when you're about to perform a browser-based financial transaction if you'd like to switch to the SafeZone mode.

### Performance

As far as Avast's impact on system performance goes, in a real-world test Avast completed its scans in a timely yet not blazingly fast manner. A Quick Scan took about 20 minutes, and the Full Scan took 59 minutes. RAM usage was surprisingly light, with Avast only eating up about 16MB when running a scan.

[CNET Labs determined](#) that Avast has a fairly light touch on your computer's performance.

Avast Free 2012 scored well below the average impact on startup time, and had the least impact of all suites tested on your PC's shutdown time. Scans were faster than average, beating big names like Norton, Kaspersky, and Bitdefender, a tad slower than AVG, but not as fast as Trend Micro or Webroot.

Security Program	Boot time	Shutdown time	Scan time	MS Office performance	iTunes decoding	Media multitasking	Cinebench
Unprotected system	40	6	n/a	395	120	342	17,711
Average of all tested systems (to date)	67.4	16.2	1,058	414	125	347	17,129
Avast Free Antivirus 2012	55.2	9.6	800	412	126	347	16,976

<b>Avast Pro Antivirus 2012</b>	69.8	11.3	732	402	126	343	17,148
<b>Avast Internet Security 2012</b>	63.6	12.2	831	407	125	346	17,060

**\*All tests measured in seconds, except for Cinebench. On the Cinebench test, the higher number is better.**

Avast performed better than average on the MS Office test, around average on iTunes Decoding and Media Multitasking, and a bit worse than average in our Cinebench test. On the key end-user experiences of its impact on your startup and shutdown times, and scan time performance, Avast won't make you want to walk a plank out of frustration.

All the security features in the world do you no good if they don't keep you safe, and on that count Avast performs well in general. However, as results from independent efficacy testing groups indicate, Avast could've had a better 2011.

[AV-Test.org](#) gave the previous version of Avast a passing rating in its most recent test, on a Windows 7 computer from December 2011. Avast 6 barely passed with the minimum passing score of 11 out of 18. It reached 4 out of 6 in Protection, 3.0 out of 6 in Repair, and a 5 out of 6 in Usability, for a total of 12. Usability includes testing for false positives, which Avast suffered on.

[AV-Comparatives.org](#) also saw room for improvement in Avast during November 2011. The suite blocked only 93.6 percent of threats tested during that month, which could then be kicked up to a more respectable 95.9 percent with some settings tweaks by the user. Looking at January 2011 to November 2011, Avast did much better, blocking 95.6 percent outright and bumping to 97.5 percent with adjusted settings.

As far as certification goes, Avast received the Advanced+ certification from AV-Comparatives for the first half of 2011, but only Standard certification in the second half. Right now, we doubt that this is going to cause much consternation among Avast fans, but a full year of weak scores could smite the ardor of even the most enthusiastic fan.

Judging from these results, Avast has to make some changes to its detection rates quickly to convince people that its strong feature set is worth it.

### Conclusion

When it comes to your security, Avast 2012 gets a lot right. It's got a usable, uncluttered interface, solid although not stellar benchmarks, and a set of features that keeps it at the forefront of Windows security.

It's true that the changes to the suite better improve its performance in efficacy tests or there could be serious problems, but for now we've got three key reasons for enthusiastically recommending Avast Antivirus Free 2012 as an Editors' Choice for free security suite. First, it's got the most aggressively forward-thinking feature set of the free suites. Second, it's very good at protecting you. It's not the best at it, but it does what it does well, and that leads to the third reason it's earned its award: it protects you without dragging your PC into the mud. Few people want security that makes a good machine run like an old one, and on that count, Avast has your back.

Free antivirus Avast gets new look, features:

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Publisher's Description

From [AVAST Software](#):



Avast Free Antivirus is a full-featured product, with the same antivirus and anti-spyware scanning engine used in our premium products. Version 7.0 provides even faster protection than its predecessor and offers a web-reputation browser extension as well as virtualization technology. Accurate threat updates via avast. CommunityIQ technology ensure worry-free downloading, surfing, social networking, and gaming--for over 170 million registered users (and over 130 million active users).

What's new in this version:

- Changes in the autosandbox module
- Improvements in Remote Assistance (support for UAC prompts etc.)
- Improvements in SafeZone (protection against kernel-mode keyloggers; Updated SafeZone Browser; clipboard sharing, etc.)
- Outlook plugin redesign
- Opera support in WebRep
- SiteCorrect module for the detection of unwanted websites
- Windows 8 compatibility updates
- Emergency Updater

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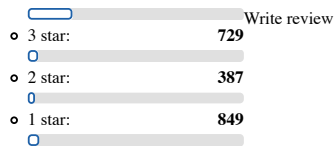


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## "Even better than a lot of paid AV software"

June 29, 2012 | By [MikeJV425](#)

Version: Avast Free Antivirus 7.0.1426

### Pros

- Does NOT slow down the computer
- Fast scanning
- Very useful Boot-time scan
- Using it for 2 years now, NO infections yet!!!

### Cons

- a few False-positives

### Summary

I can't believe this is free. It's even better than a lot of paid antivirus software (including Norton and McAfee)

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Was this review helpful? [\(1\)](#) [\(1\)](#)

## "Good free AV but not the BEST"

June 28, 2012 | By [raju\\_thorat](#)

Version: Avast Free Antivirus 7.0.1426

### Pros

Works faster than most paid AV.

### Cons

1. You should install it only on clean computer because it failed to remove active malwares on my PC. I switched to MSE for that.
2. Too much options under settings and not all are optimum , and hence novice user may be confused . Why PUP scanning not enabled by default? Company should provide very less setting like in MSE.
- 3.It is joke that a free product requires registration? Not only that it expires in one year.

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## "week benchmarks but for me it works great"

June 25, 2012 | By [Anderson69](#)

Version: Avast Free Antivirus 7.0.1426

## Pros

effective on malware, viruses, and infected web-sites. strong boot time scan, and works very well for home users.

## Cons

effective on malware, viruses, and infected web-sites. strong boot time scan, and works very well for home users.

## Summary

effective on malware, viruses, and infected web-sites. strong boot time scan, and works very well for home users.

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- ## "Good product for home use"

June 24, 2012 | By [safe\\_gate2003](#)

Version: Avast Free Antivirus 7.0.1426

## Pros

effective on malware, viruses, and infected web-sites. strong boot time scan, and works very well for home users.

## Cons

sometimes it is heavy on the PC, and delays the startup.

## Summary

good product for the price, the services offered are also decent.

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- ## "best free AV all around"

June 24, 2012 | By [woogyboogy1](#)

Version: Avast Free Antivirus 7.0.1426

## Pros

I have been using Avast for over a year now and it works perfectly.  
There is No Better Free Anti Virus period.

## Cons

the updates on start up can get annoying

## Summary

I am no computer wiz, but Avast has been easy to use and very good at what it does.

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Was this review helpful? (1) (4)

---

- ## "works great on xp sp3 3gig machine 2 gig ram"

June 23, 2012 | By [ck1nu](#)

Version: Avast Free Antivirus 7.0.1426

## Pros

works good

## Cons

slow scan even on 80 gig drive with 20 gigs on it

## Summary

works great but the mindless add to upgrade is crazy...

[Reply to this review](#)

Was this review helpful? (0) (4)

---

## "Very good for free but some quirks!"

June 17, 2012 | By [James Bigelow](#)  
Version: Avast Free Antivirus 7.0.1426

### Pros

Free, easy install, not a whole lot of pop-up warnings about what i might be installing.

### Cons

sometimes stops installs on good programs.

[Reply to this review](#)

Was this review helpful? (0) (4)

---

## "A very complete free antivirus."

June 17, 2012 | By [Moral Technology](#)  
Version: Avast Free Antivirus 7.0.1426

### Pros

- Good detection of malicious software.
- Very light on system resources.
- Customizable.
- Blocks many common passageways of attack (IM/P2P/Web Browsing/Network).
- Offers features like the "AutoSandbox" which sometimes prevent a dangerous file from doing harm.
- A browser plugin that helps you understand the reputation of the sights that you go to.. according to community data.
- Boot Time Scanner, which is very good for cleaning up problems that a full scan may have trouble removing.
- Easy to Navigate.
- Good User Interface.
- Vocal announcements of Malware Detection.

### Cons

- It comes with "PUP" (Potentially Unwanted Program) detection disabled by default.
- It also by default has it set to where "Attempt to remove packed file, if action fails, do nothing." for the processing of infected archives. A common user may not know what to do if the antivirus fails.
- Scans come without automatic actions setup. Some files that the Anti-Virus attempts to quarantine can sometimes be repaired.
- A commonly misunderstood free registration. It can be easily confused as a 30 day trial rather than a yearly e-mail address registration.
- Attempts to install software (Google Chrome) that the program does not need to function.
- Configuration for new users can be a bit overwhelming.
- Proactive Anti-Malware protection not as good as that of AVG.
- Script Shield only seems to work with Internet Explorer.

## Summary

Avast! Free Antivirus can protect the computer it is installed on if you go through the configuration and you set it up for PUP detection and to take more comprehensive action during malware detection. In its default settings though, it's not that impressive.

I feel that avast! could improve by asking for free e-mail registration DURING the install so that there is no more confusion for the average user.

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Was this review helpful? (0) (4)

---

## "NOT FREE. ONLY A FREE TRIAL."

June 15, 2012 | By [Sirjamesalot11](#)

Version: Avast Free Antivirus 7.0.1426

### Pros

Did its job until the free trial expired.

### Cons

The product is called Avast Free Antivirus and is found when looking for "Free products only". If it wants to force a subscription after a trial period it should be renamed and listed under "Free to Try". Needs to be relabeled and renamed.

## Summary

Don't support this mislabeled product if you believe in open-source and sharing. Any product listed as free can make its money off donations from a supportive community if its product is good enough.

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Was this review helpful? (0) (6)

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## "This is the best."

June 15, 2012 | By [johnnyxbox](#)

Version: Avast Free Antivirus 7.0.1426

### Pros

I've been using Avast ever since my Symantec subscription expired (4 or 5 years ago) and within a month my computer coincidentally got infected with a nasty virus forcing me to reformat my drive because I could not remove Symantec to install another antivirus. Avast is free just like they say, it's easy, it's hardly noticeable, it's cool, it's fast and it works!

### Cons

None whatsoever.

## Summary

In the five years that I've used Avast I have not had to worry or recover a drive due to a virus or other malware. I've tried many different antivirus programs, both paid and free. Avast has been the simplest, most effective, most reliable and least expensive option. Admittedly each program has strengths, and sometimes it is useful to use a second antivirus for extra security after an infection has occurred like when you buy used equipment. But for day to day security--Avast!

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