U.S.

Computer viruses attack in some cities more than others

Severe weather, Cyber Monday shopping, adult sites and older computer users spike virus threats

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There are rankings for the best and worst cities for crime, education, housing prices and a slew of other quality-of-life measures. Now cities can be categorized by another factor: The most computer infections.

The Enigma Software Group, the maker of SpyHunter anti-malware software, analyzed more than 25 million computer viruses picked up by its software in the 150 largest U.S. cities.

The largest cities — New York, Los Angeles and Chicago — have the most incidents because they are the most populated. Per capita, Little Rock, Arkansas; Tampa, Florida; and St. Louis have inordinately high computer virus infection rates.

It can't be pinned down why computer users in those cities are more likely to catch viruses, but there are some guesses. One factor is severe weather, such as snowstorms and heavy storms, which leave

people homebound and cruising the Internet.

Another is online shopping on Cyber Monday, the Monday after Thanksgiving, when many retailers offer online deals. "In the days following Cyber Monday, infections across the board spike 40 percent across the U.S., when the bad guys are able to trick people easier," said Ryan Gerding, an Enigma spokesman.

One of the most common ways people's computers are infected by malware is when they are tricked into clicking on links that either download malware or take them to websites that have viruses. These links come in the form of e-mails or social media messages hijacked by hackers.

And infected content is common on adult websites. "A good chunk of the infections we detect come from people who are looking at adult content," Gerding said. "It's all about the bad guys who want to get those infections on computers and are trying to get you to click on a link you wouldn't normally click on."

Another factor is the age of the population. "Cities with older populations have higher infection rates per capita," he said. That could be because older users are more likely to be on older PC operating systems. "The assumption is that in younger cities, people are doing more online activity on mobile devices."

Other cities that rank high on the computer virus list: Orlando, Florida; Denver; Atlanta; Newark, New Jersey; Salt Lake City; Madison, Wisconsin; and Cleveland.

Moving to cities where computer virus rates far outpace the national average doesn't mean your computer would be more likely to catch a virus. It just means that residents of those cities have been more prone to click on bad links.
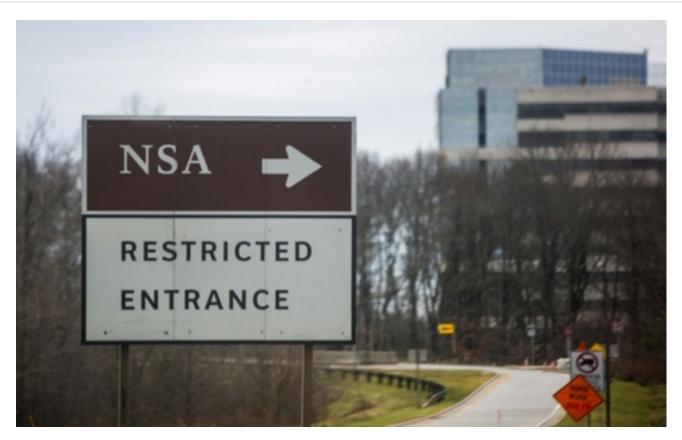
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