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Household antivirus, explained

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How to scan an Android phone for malware with Google Play Protect

https://cyberguardlab.com/blog/android-play-protect-malware-scan

Independent US household comparison site. Not the vendor. Paid links below may earn a commission. Confirm first-year price, renewal, device limit, and refund terms at checkout.

Google Play Protect is Android's built-in safety check for apps. Google help docs say it scans Play Store apps before you download them, checks the device for potentially harmful apps (malware) from other sources, warns you, and may deactivate or remove harmful apps. For many US households, keeping Play Protect on and scanning there is enough - you do not have to buy a mobile antivirus first. This guide is about Android Play Protect scans, not Windows Defender (Is Microsoft Defender enough?), Chrome scam extensions, or fake virus warning popups.

1. Confirm Play Protect is on

Google says Play Protect is on by default and recommends you keep it on.

* Open the Google Play Store app.
* Tap your profile icon (top right).
* Tap Play Protect.
* Open Settings (gear) if you need them.
* Turn Scan apps with Play Protect on.
* Optional but useful if you ever sideload apps: turn on Improve harmful app detection so unknown apps can be sent to Google for checking.

2. Run a scan and read the result

* Open Play Store -> profile -> Play Protect.
* Tap Scan (wording can vary slightly by Android version).
* If Play Protect finds a potentially harmful app, follow the on-screen steps. Google docs say it may notify you to uninstall, disable the app until you remove it, or remove the app automatically.
* Prefer uninstalling anything flagged. Do not keep installing an unknown APK from a text or pop-up.

3. Safer app habits after the scan

* Install from the Google Play Store when you can. Play Protect also checks apps before Play downloads.
* Be careful with APKs from links in texts, ads, or "your phone is infected" pages - those often pair with phishing and fake warnings.
* Check Play Protect certification under Play Store -> profile -> Settings -> About if your device shows certification status. Google notes device certification troubleshooting is separate from Play Protect scan settings.
* Review permissions for unused apps if Play Protect offers that privacy control on your Android version.
* If a stranger on the phone asks you to install a remote-support app, stop - that is closer to a tech-support scam than a real Play Protect alert.

4. When buy-nothing is enough (and when it is not)

* Buy-nothing path: Play Protect on + Play Store apps + no random APKs covers many family phones.
* Still reset or get hands-on help if the phone keeps installing apps you did not choose, banking apps fail after a shady install, or you cannot remove a flagged app.
* Windows PCs in the same house are a different problem - use Windows Security / Microsoft Defender there; see Is Microsoft Defender enough?.
* Paid multi-device suites are optional, not required, to run a Play Protect scan.

FAQ

How do I scan an Android phone for malware with Google Play Protect?

Open the Play Store, tap your profile, open Play Protect, confirm scanning is on, then tap Scan. Remove anything it flags.

Is Google Play Protect free?

Yes. It is built into Play Store / Android devices that include Play services. Google recommends keeping scan apps with Play Protect on.

Do I need a paid antivirus app on Android?

Often no. Play Protect plus careful installs is a valid buy-nothing path. Consider extra help only if malware persists or you manage many risky sideloaded apps.

What if Play Protect removes an app automatically?

That usually means Google judged it harmful. Do not reinstall the same APK from an unknown link. Use Play Store alternatives you trust.

Can a fake virus alert webpage replace Play Protect?

No. Browser scare pages are often scams. Use Play Protect inside the Play Store app, not a random site Scan now button.

If you still want a paid suite

Scanning with Play Protect does not require a paid mobile antivirus purchase. Built-in Play Protect is a valid buy-nothing choice for many Android households. If the household later wants multi-device paid protection across phones and PCs, use only these on-site paid links: TotalAV (paid link), Norton (paid link), Bitdefender (paid link), McAfee (paid link), Avast (paid link).

Sources

* Use Google Play Protect (Google Android Help)
* Recognize and Report Phishing (CISA)
* How To Avoid a Scam (FTC)
* Windows security overview (Microsoft)

Also read

* How to remove a scam browser extension from Chrome
* Check a download before you open an .exe or .zip
* 8 ways to tell a virus warning popup is fake
* Is Microsoft Defender enough for a typical home PC?
* How to wipe a phone or laptop before you sell it