Cyber Infection Prevention: Five Helpful Hints From PNC For Students Heading Off To College

- Computers and cellphones don't get sick days
- Decrease the risk of infecting yourself and others with good cyber hygiene

PITTSBURGH, Aug. 16, 2017 -- With cars overloaded with personal belongings and brains tangled up in a mix of excitement, anticipation and a little fear of the unknown, young adults across the country are heading off to college for the first time. Parents take comfort that they've spent 18 years preparing their child to survive on their own. But have they prepared their student to defend against that modern-day threat on college campuses – cyber attacks? Whether a widespread issue infecting computers and networks around the globe or an isolated phishing attempt on one student, prevention against cyber infections, just like the student's physical wellbeing, comes down to practicing good cyber hygiene.

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"Just like germs spread the common cold and flu undetected from one person to many, criminals infect smartphones, tablets and computers, with malware that can steal precious personal information from unsuspecting victims. Or, they take over the device, holding term papers, family photos and bank accounts access for ransom," said Deborah Guild, chief security officer for The PNC Financial Services Group, Inc.

There is no such thing as a sick day for technology. Computers, tablets and even smartphones are vital tools for college students today. The information available through those devices – bank account access, password keystrokes, access to the university network – is of great value to criminals, according to PNC cyber defense experts.

"Human error is the common point of entry. While it's not as simple as washing your hands, you can make yourself less of a target by using common sense and practicing good technology hygiene to keep your cellphone, computer and tablet free from harmful malware," Guild said.

When using smartphones, computers and tablets both on and off campus, students should keep in mind these helpful hints:

1. **TICKS, CLICKS AND TRICKS** – Ticks carry disease and are hard to detect with the human eye. Similarly, clicks can be harmful to your cyber health when clicking on a link or an attachment from an unknown source. Even if an item appears to come from a friend, stop and confirm that it was actually sent by that friend. Pick up your phone and call – don't email - the friend to confirm he/she sent you the link or attachment. Bad guys are known to trick you into thinking they are a trusted friend, and deliver a nasty cyber virus or malware.

2. **STRANGER DANGER "COOTIES"**– Cooties may be imaginary germs, but in cyber space, malware, cyber bugs and worms are very real threats. "Don't talk to strangers" is basic advice for youngsters on the playground and is equally applicable to adults visiting social media sites or surfing the internet. If you do not know someone, do NOT friend them! Once you click to accept a friend invitation or message from someone that you do not know, your device can be infected undetected by malware, logging every keystroke – including passwords – or cataloging everything on your computer.

3. **SECURITY BOOSTER SHOTS**– Simply put, don't ignore upgrade notifications on your devices. Upgrades for your various apps as well as the operating system of your device are sent for a reason and may include security enhancements. After all, a new vaccine is needed every flu season to stay ahead of that nasty bug; stay current with your software upgrades as another defense against cyber bugs.

4. **UNDESIRED SIDE EFFECTS OF "FREE" UPLOADS** – Only upload and install apps from well-known stores, such as Google Play, Apple App Store, Windows Store and Amazon – even if it costs a few

dollars. Unfamiliar sources may be breeding grounds for malware. Or, if the site is offering apps for free when the same software costs a few dollars elsewhere, what may actually be sold from that site is your information. By uploading that app, you may unknowingly give the website permission to sell details about you, extracted from your digital footprint. Read the documentation provided by the app developers, understand the level of access to your phone that the app requires, and check the number of uploads and reviews.

5. **"DELETING" CONTENT IS NO CURE** – Once you post comments, photos, recipes, etc., to social media sites, please be aware that your content can live forever. Even if you delete your tweet or a photo from other social sharing sites, traces or copies of that content can remain. Look in the Terms & Conditions of the social media channels that you agree to (often in a rush) when you first joined. While your content may no longer publish on the public-facing site, the content may still be catalogued behind the scenes.

"These helpful hints may be fun reminders for students who have much to think about as they arrive on college campuses, but they are, in fact, just a handful of the information security best practices that help to safeguard your student against cyber attacks," Guild said. "Behaviors that we adopt in our youth often turn into good habits we possess for life. Start those first few days you step on campus with good cyber security hygiene."

For more information, visit PNC's Security and Privacy website.

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