

Information and Cybersecurity Awareness

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Understand the risks of torrent/popcorn time

'Make your home a haven for online safety'

Torrent downloads! Free movies! Free music! Free downloads! Is it safe? Is it legal? Can I get caught?

Introduction

Torrenting is a highly popular type of file sharing based on peer-to-peer (P2P) networking, meaning that files are shared directly between users rather than passing through a centralised server. Torrents work by breaking up large files into little pieces, called packets. The packets are shared throughout the network of computers (called leechers), all contributing to the distribution of the larger file. While a person is downloading packets from other users, packets from their computer are also uploaded for sharing on the network. Torrent downloads are generally fast and convenient, especially when bandwidth is an issue.

But before you climb aboard the P2P bandwagon, it's a good idea to understand the **risks** involved with downloading torrents.

Risks

- **Viruses and malware:** One of the common risks that torrent users face is malware. You don't know if the torrent file you downloaded contains a virus.



- **Vulnerability and data safety:** When a user downloads, uploads or shares a torrent file, online hackers become active and tend to collect information about a user's online activities.
- **Legal or illegal:** Torrenting itself isn't illegal, but downloading unsanctioned copyrighted material is. This is where torrent users can face legal issues when downloading torrents.

How to protect yourself

- **Abstain.** Due to the risks, torrenting is not allowed on the UP network, except for official work-related purposes and only if authorised by ITS.
- **Use a trusted anti-malware app** that scans files as you download them, helping you to avoid downloading viruses and other types of malware.
- **Download only legal torrents**, including content that has been released for free, to avoid copyright issues.
- **Choose a VPN** that is reliable and ideal for torrenting and use optimised security settings.
- **Connect to a server.** Make sure you connect to a P2P-optimised server.
- **Visit a reputable torrent site** and choose torrent files with lots of seeders as they are less likely to be infected.

Torrenting is used for legal purposes. However, much of the content found on torrent sites—movies, books, games, music, etc—is copyrighted material, and downloading it is against the law.

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