Instant Message Or Instant Menace?

(NAPSA)—If you know a teenager, she's likely using one. You may even be using one yourself. "Instant messaging" programs let millions of personal computer users all over the world use the Internet to communicate any hour of the day.

E-mail has generally been the tool of choice for electronically sending longer communications and documents but instant messaging applications like Yahoo! Messenger, AOL Messenger, MSN Messenger or Windows Messenger are ideal for quick "real-time" communications—like e-mail on steroids. The appeal of instant messaging lies in its ability to let users send and receive messages as fast as they can type and read. Although developed primarily for personal use, instant messaging applications are making their way into business because they provide lightning fast communications at the desktop.

Many users don't know instant messaging can pose a computer security risk because of their ability to spread so-called computer viruses, worms or other "malicious" programs.

"Most people are aware that you can pick up a computer virus or worm through e-mail attachments or software downloads, but many aren't aware that they can also come through instant messages as file attachments," says Kelly Martin, product manager for Norton AntiVirus 2003 at Symantec Corp. "People using instant messaging can receive an attached file that contains a worm that can wipe out their files, steal personal

A good antivirus program can protect your computer from instant message infections.

information or generally just wreak havoc on their computer."

What's the best way to combat these threats? The first step is an antivirus program that automatically protects against infected files, says Martin. Norton AntiVirus 2003 provides such protection. Antivirus software is most effective when it has been updated with current virus definitions—software updates that allow the application to identify and fix the newest viruses based on a digital "description" contained in the definition.

"Norton AntiVirus 2003 automatically retrieves the updates when you are online so you don't have to remember to go out and get your updates," Martin says. "It's perfect for people who love instant messaging because it lets them focus on chatting with their friends, without compromising their safety and security."

For more information, visit www.symantec.com.