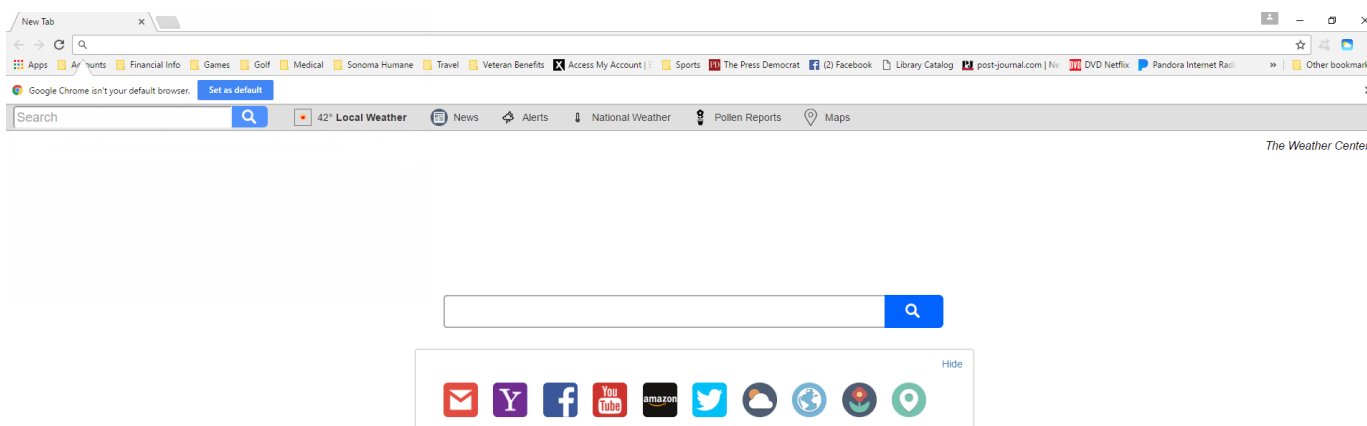


Browser Hijacking Malware

Do you have Google set as your home page when you open your internet browser, whether it be Internet Explorer, Edge, Firefox or Chrome? Have you noticed that the letters GOOGLE are always spelled out above the search bar? Even when Google is promoting a holiday theme or announcing the birthday of some historic figure. In all instances, the word GOOGLE will always be spelled out above the search bar. So with that being said, take a look at the image below. Is this Google?



Though we see many multicolored icons which, at first glance, remind us of the Google page, it is in fact malware that has taken over the browser. Notice that a) the search bar is above the icons instead of below, and b) the word GOOGLE is nowhere to be seen. Furthermore, if you look above the search bar, you will notice a new toolbar with the name of “The Weather Center”. What has happened is that an application was installed without us knowing it and is not at all related to Google. It is an inferior search engine designed to take you to places you don’t want to go to.

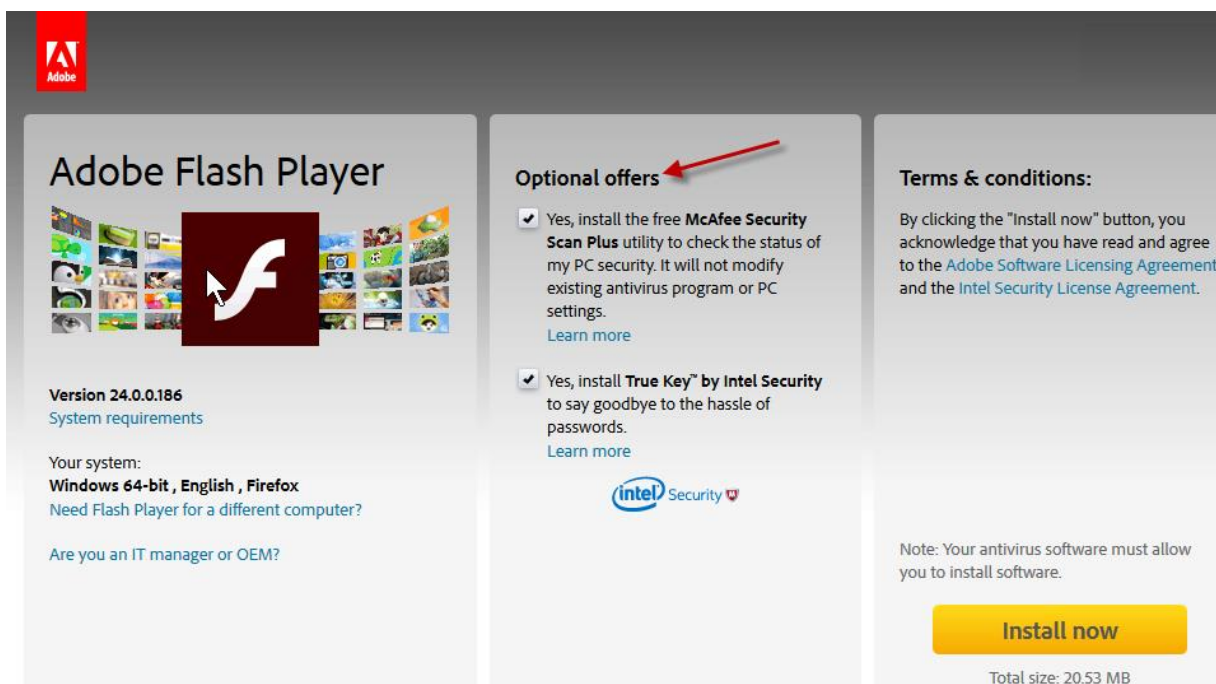
The Weather Center toolbar and search line got on this particular computer after the user installed freeware software that had a browser hijacker bundled into the installation. Unfortunately, some free downloads do not adequately disclose that other software will also be installed and you may find that you have installed this malicious program without your knowledge.

For example, when you install *custom versions* of VLC Player, a video playing application, you will also agree to change your browser homepage and default search engine to <http://query.theweathercenter.co/>. However when you

uninstall VLC Player from your computer, your web browser's default settings will not be restored. This means that you'll have to remove Query.theweathercenter.co homepage from your favorite web browser manually.

You should **always pay attention when installing software** because often, a software installer includes optional installs, such as this Query.theweathercenter.co browser hijacker. Be very careful what you agree to install. **Always opt for the custom installation** and deselect anything that is not familiar, especially optional software that you never wanted to download and install in the first place.

Another example of software being installed unintentionally is when you update Adobe Flash. Flash is a very legitimate application however this is what you'll see when you download and begin to install it:

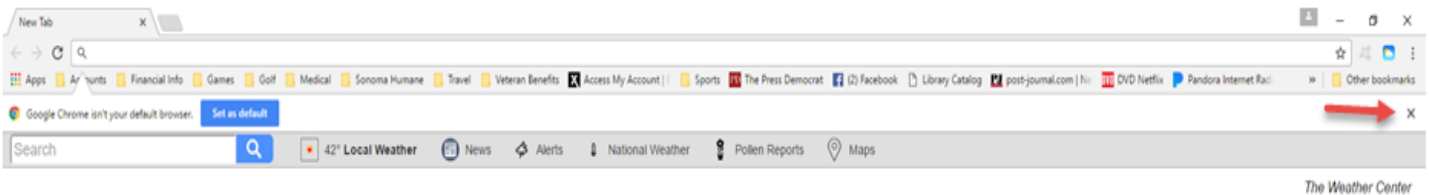



Note that there are "Optional offers" and that these offers are automatically checked which means they will be installed as soon as you click the Install Now button. Although these offers are both from known good companies (McAfee and Intel) you don't necessarily want or need them on your computer. All this means is that these two companies paid Adobe to include a download link on the Flash page.

So now that hijacking malware is installed, how do you get your browser back to normal? As noted above, even uninstalling any unwanted software isn't going to correct your browser. You have to fix it manually and each browser has a slightly different way of fixing the problem. I will give you instructions on fixing Chrome, Firefox, Internet Explorer and Edge.

Fixing Chrome Homepage:

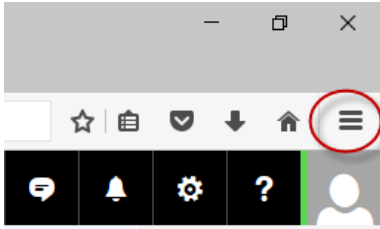
1. Open Chrome and first click the "X" at the far right of the weather bar. This will close the bar.



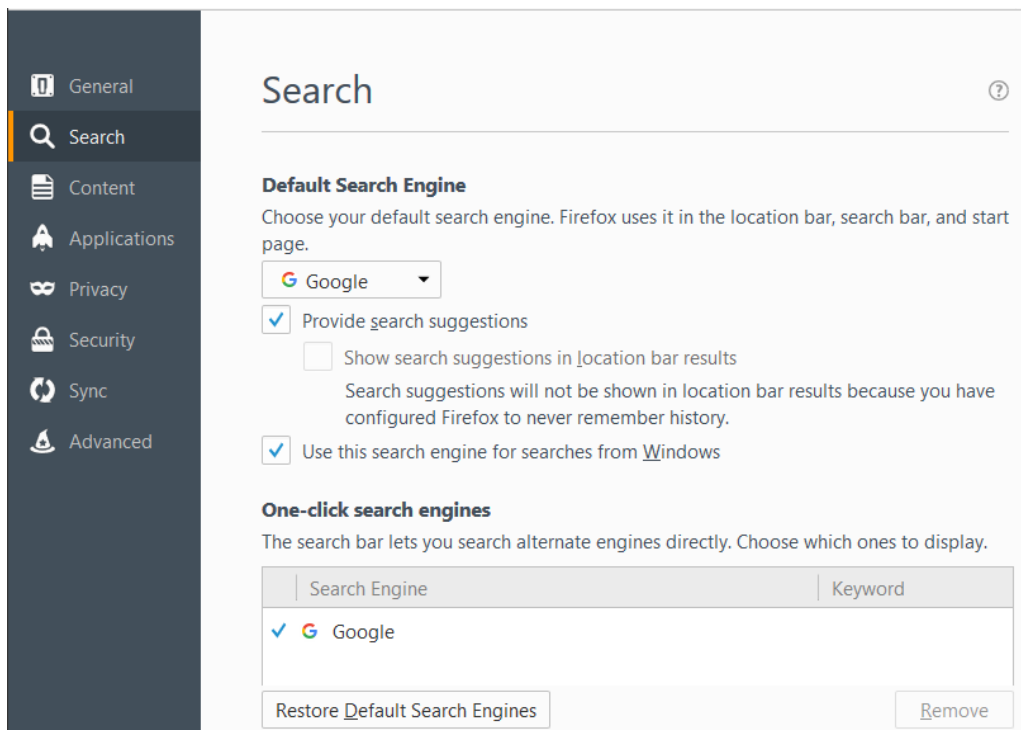
2. In the address bar, type www.google.com so that you are on the Google home page.
 3. Click the 3 dots in the upper right to open the Menu and click on Settings
- 
- A close-up image of a red window title bar with a white 'X' button. Below it is a white search bar with a star icon and a green circular menu icon containing three vertical dots.
4. Under the "On startup" section, click the blue link that says "Set pages", then click the "Use current pages" button. This will make Google your home page again.
 5. Under the Search section, click the Manage search engines button, hover over the line that says Google then click the Make default button
 6. Hover over all the rest of the lines and click the X at the end of each to delete all the other crappy search engines including the hijacker one. All that you should have left is one line that says Google (Default).
 7. Close Chrome and reopen to confirm Google is back

Fixing Firefox Homepage:

1. Open Firefox and first click the "X" at the far right of the weather bar. This will close the bar.
2. In the address bar, type www.google.com so that you are on the Google home page.
3. Click the 3 lines in the upper right to open the Menu and click on Options



4. Click the box that says Use Current Pages
5. Under the Search section in the left-hand column, make sure Google is showing under Default Search Engine. If it isn't, click the down arrow and choose it.
6. In the One-click search engines box, Google should have a green check next to. I recommend removing all other search engines by clicking on one and clicking the Remove button, then do that for each remaining search engine.



7. Close Firefox and reopen to confirm Google is back

Fixing Internet Explorer Homepage:

1. Open Internet Explorer and first click the "X" at the far right of the weather bar. This will close the bar.
2. In the address bar, type www.google.com so that you are on the Google home page.

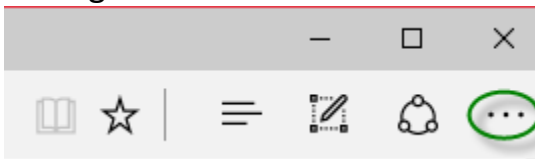
3. Click the cog in the upper right to open the Menu and click on Internet Options



4. Under the Home page section, click the Use current button. This will make Google your home page again. Click Apply then OK
5. Click the cog again and choose Manage Add-ons.
6. Click the link for Search Providers from the left column.
7. If Google is listed, click it and click the Set as default button at the bottom right of the window. Then click on all other search engines one at a time and click the Remove button.
8. Click Close, close Internet Explorer and reopen to confirm Google is back.

Fixing Edge Homepage:

1. Open Edge and first click the "X" at the far right of the weather bar. This will close the bar.
2. In the address bar, type www.google.com so that you are on the Google home page.
3. Click the three dots in the upper right to open the Menu and click on Settings



4. Under Open Microsoft Edge with section, click the down arrow and choose "A specific page or pages" and in the box below enter www.google.com and press the save icon (the floppy disk icon)
5. Scroll down and click the Advanced settings button
6. Under "Search in the address bar with" section, if it doesn't say Google then click the "Change search engine" button
7. Click on Google and click the Set as default button
8. Close Edge and reopen to confirm Google is back.