

External storage media

External storage media such as USB sticks, portable hard drives or CDs/DVDs have become part of everyday digital life by now. But what happens if these storage media with your sensitive data get lost or become infected with malware?

You can use external storage media securely by...

- encrypting sensitive data.
- securely deleting sensitive data.
- deactivating the “autorun” function.
- protecting all connected systems with antivirus software.

The dangers of external storage media

External storage media have the benefit of mobility - they fit into any handbag or jacket pocket, so you can easily take them along anywhere. However, this also poses some risks which can be tackled with the following measures:

1. **Loss or theft:** Encrypt your sensitive data ([see below \(#encrypt\)](#)) and keep a copy of these data at home.
2. **Lifespan:** External storage media are a good means for backing up your data. Still, they don't last forever. USB sticks, hard drives and CDs/DVDs are generally expected to last 10 years - so make sure you get replacements in good time!
3. **Readability:** Make sure that the required systems and readers are available so that you can still read your data later - it is no good to have data carriers you can no longer read.
4. **Malware:** Viruses, worms and Trojans etc. which hide in external storage media can actually infect your whole system once you connect them to it. You should therefore deactivate the autorun function ([see below \(#autorun\)](#)) and use anti-virus software.
5. **Disposal:** If you no longer use your external storage media and would like to dispose of them, please make sure to [securely delete this storage medium \(https://www.ebas.ch/en/secure-deletion/\)](https://www.ebas.ch/en/secure-deletion/).

External storage media such as USB sticks, portable hard drives or CDs/DVDs offer the benefit of mobility - you can simply take them along anywhere. However, this also poses some increased risks such as loss, theft, defects, malware or access by third parties.

Further information for all those interested

Encrypting sensitive data

If you use external storage media to carry your sensitive data around, it is absolutely vital to protect them against unauthorised access. In addition to other feasible methods such as file passwords, many USB stick and portable hard drive manufacturers provide their own software for this purpose. In addition, there are some alternatives to be found on the Internet.

Deactivating the autorun function

Windows

It is relatively simple to temporarily deactivate the autorun function in Windows. To do so, press and hold the “Shift” key on your keyboard. Then connect the external storage medium to your computer and only let go of the “Shift” key afterwards. This process prevents Windows from immediately executing programs and files on the external storage medium.

To permanently deactivate the autorun function in Windows 10, follow these instructions:

1. Use [WINDOWS] + [I] to open settings and then click “devices”. Here, select “autorun”.
2. You can now deactivate the slider for “Use autorun for all media and devices”. This completely deactivates the autorun function. You can however also leave the slider in its current position and select the desired action for every media type.
3. Amongst others, there is the option to choose what happens whenever you insert a memory card. You can use the drop-down menu to select “Take no action” if you don’t want any automatic action for an option.
4. It is also possible to configure this process for removable storage devices and their contents. In addition, you can also determine here whether DVDs and Blu-Ray discs are to be automatically played or not.
5. Further down on this page you will also find the autorun function setting for external devices such as smartphones. Here, too, you can choose whether photos and videos for instance should be synchronised.

macOS

With macOS, it is very simple to permanently deactivate the autorun function for CDs/DVDs. You can adjust these settings under CDs & DVDs in system settings. There are no settings to adjust for USB sticks and portable hard drives.

Secure deletion

See [Secure deletion of storage media \(https://www.ebas.ch/en/secure-deletion/\)](https://www.ebas.ch/en/secure-deletion/).