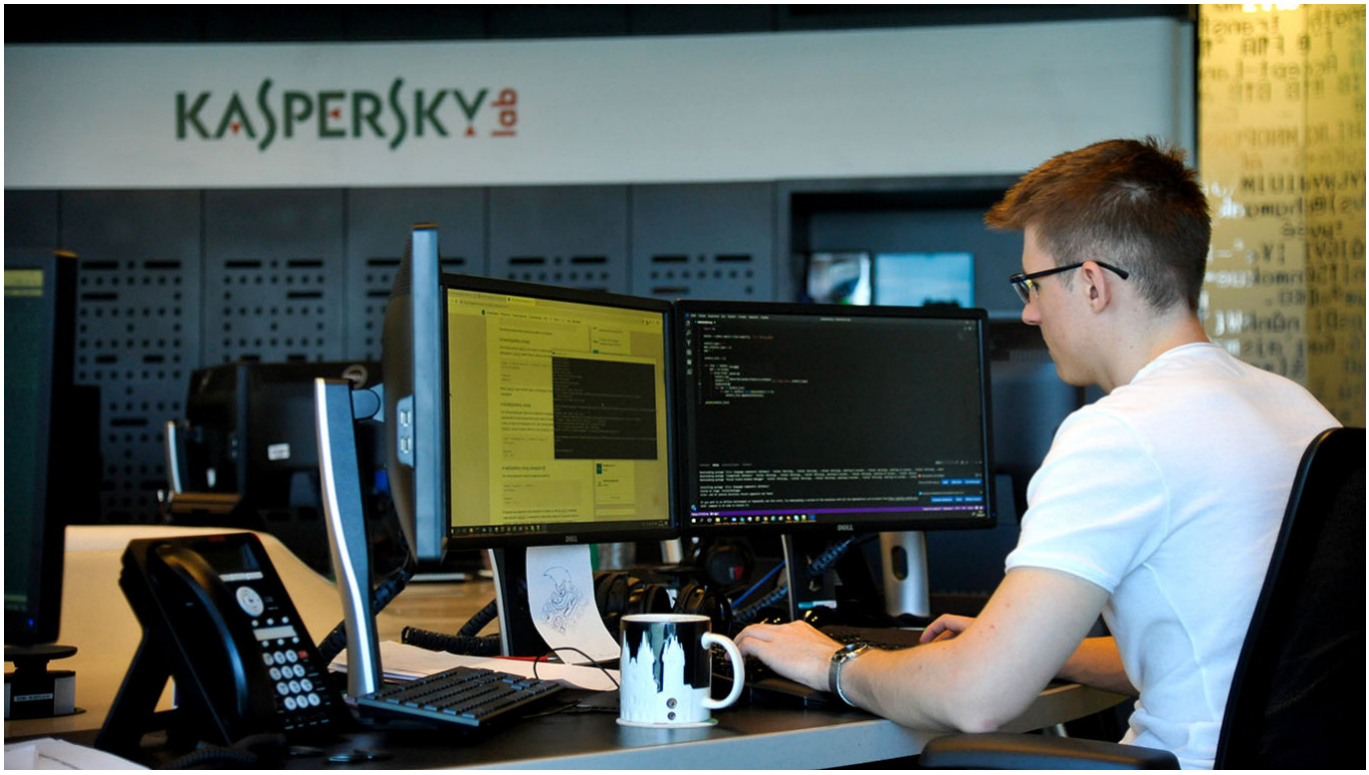
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U.S. Bans Russia's Kaspersky Antivirus Software

By AFP

June 21, 2024



Kaspersky Lab office in Moscow. **Alexander Avilov / Moskva News Agency**

President Joe Biden's administration on Thursday banned Russia-based cybersecurity firm Kaspersky from providing its popular antivirus products in the United States over national security concerns, the U.S. Commerce Department said.

"Kaspersky will generally no longer be able to, among other activities, sell its software within the United States or provide updates to software already in use," the department said in a statement.

The announcement came after a lengthy investigation found Kaspersky's "continued operations in the United States presented a national security risk due to the Russian Government's offensive cyber capabilities and capacity to influence or direct Kaspersky's operations," it said.

U.S. Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said that "Russia has shown time and again they have the capability and intent to exploit Russian companies, like Kaspersky Lab, to collect and weaponize sensitive US information."

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Updated with Kremlin's comments.

In a statement to AFP, Kaspersky said the U.S. Commerce Department "made its decision based on the present geopolitical climate and theoretical concerns," and vowed to "pursue all legally available options to preserve its current operations and relationships."

"Kaspersky does not engage in activities which threaten U.S. national security and, in fact, has made significant contributions with its reporting and protection from a variety of threat actors that targeted US interests and allies," the company said.

The move is the first such action taken since an executive order issued under Donald Trump's presidency gave the Commerce Department the power to investigate whether certain companies pose a national security risk.

Raimondo said the Commerce Department's actions demonstrated to America's adversaries that it would not hesitate to act when "their technology poses a risk to the United States and its citizens."

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While Kaspersky is headquartered in Moscow, it has offices in 31 countries around the world, servicing more than 400 million users and 270,000 corporate clients in more than 200 countries, the Commerce Department said.

As well as banning the sale of Kaspersky's antivirus software, the Commerce Department also added three entities linked to the firm to a list of companies deemed to be a national security concern "for their cooperation with Russian military and intelligence authorities in support of the Russian government's cyber intelligence objectives."

The Commerce Department said it "strongly encouraged" users to switch to new vendors, although its decision does not ban them from using the software should they choose to do so.

Kaspersky is allowed to continue certain operations in the United States, including providing antivirus updates, until September 29 this year, "in order to minimize disruption to US consumers and businesses and to give them time to find suitable alternatives," it added.

The Kremlin later on Friday criticized Washington's decision to ban Kaspersky as creating "unfair competition" from American companies.

"Kaspersky Lab is a company which is very, very competitive on the international level," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

"This is a favorite method of unfair competition from the part of the United States. They resort to such tactics every time," he added.

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