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Android recover messages after factory reset

Here's a fun one: There's new Android malware making the rounds that is not only irritating—thanks, pop-up ads—but it's also incredibly difficult to remove from your Android device once you're infected.Though this somewhat-new "xHelper" malware has affected a low number of Android users so far (around 45,000, estimates Symantec), the fact that nobody has any clear advice on how to remove it is a worrisome fact. While the odds are good that you won't get hit with this malware, given its low installation rate so far—even though it's been active since March—you should still know what it does and how to (hopefully) avoid it.As Malwarebytes describes, xHelper starts by concealing itself as a regular app by spoofing legitimate apps' package names. Once it's on your device, you're either stuck with a "semi-stealth" version, which drops an xHelper icon blatantly in your notifications—but no app or shortcut icons—or a "full-stealth" version, which you'll only notice if you visit Settings > Apps & notifications > App Info (or whatever the navigation is on your specific Android device) and scroll down to see the installed "xHelper" app.What does xHelper do?Thankfully, xHelper isn't destructive malware in the sense that it's not recording your passwords, credit card data, or anything else you're doing on your device and sending it off to some unknown attacker. Instead, it simply spams you with pop-up advertisements on your device and annoying notifications that all try to get you to install more apps from Google Play—presumably how the xHelper's authors are making cash from the malware.The dark side, as reported by ZDNet, is that xHelper can allegedly download and install apps on your behalf. It doesn't appear to be doing so at the moment, but if this were to happen—coupled with the app's mysterious ability to persist past uninstallations and factory resets—would be a huge backdoor for anyone affected by the malware.Wait, I can't uninstall it?Yep. This is the insidious part of xHelper. Neither Symantec nor Malwarebytes have any good recommendations for getting this malware off your device once it's installed, as the mechanisms it uses to persist past a full factory reset of your device are unknown. As Symantec describes:"None of the samples we analyzed were available on the Google Play Store, and while it is possible that the Xhelper malware is downloaded by users from unknown sources, we believe that may not be the only channel of distribution.From our telemetry, we have seen these apps installed more frequently on certain phone brands, which leads us to believe that the attackers may be focusing on specific brands. However, we believe it to be unlikely that Xhelper comes preinstalled on devices given that these apps don't have any indication of being system apps. In addition, numerous users have been complaining on forums about the persistent presence of this malware on their devices, despite performing factory resets and manually uninstalling it. Since it is unlikely that the apps are systems apps, this suggests that another malicious system app is persistently downloading the malware, which is something we are currently investigating (keep an eye on the Threat Intelligence blog for more on this)."So…If you think you're infected with xHelper, you can try downloading some standard antivirus apps to your Android device. It's possible they might help, but I'd err on the side of free antivirus apps for now, lest you find yourself paying a chunk of cash for an app (or subscription) that doesn't actually help you out at all. The xHelper malware is just that quirky.I have the full belief that someone—Google itself, or one of the big antivirus players—will find a way to thwart and remove this malware, but it's going to take a bit of time to get to that solution. In the meantime...How to avoid getting hit with xHelper in the first placeRight now, the best thing you can do to prevent getting hit with this kind of malware is to be mindful of your web browsing habits. Make sure you aren't getting redirected to scammy websites that encourage you to sideload unknown apps—or apps that appear safe—onto your device. When in doubt, only install apps from the Google Play Store. Don't sideload apps, as in, don't download and install them manually on your device unless you really know what you're doing, trust the app's developer completely, and trust that the app you're downloading is actually something safe from the developer it claims it is from. (While this won't protect you one-hundred percent of the time, sticking to the Google Play Store a lot safer than downloading random .APKs from websites you know nothing about.) You never get used to that gut-wrenching moment when one realizes a very important SMS message or thread has just been deleted. What do you do now? Desperate users will go through anything to save those crucial messages if the trashed information is important enough. Recovering deleted messages is no easy feat, but jumping some hoops will definitely get you somewhere. There are some chances you can get those precious text messages back, and we can help you get to them!Did you ever hear people say that files don't necessarily disappear from your computer when you delete them? This is definitely true. All those files are hidden somewhere in the hard drive, waiting to be retrieved… or replaced. This is exactly what happens with Android phones as well. Everything we delete, including SMS messages, sticks around until enough time passes by and/or the space is needed to store other data. A little about how deletion works You may still be wondering how this is even possible. It's actually not a very complicated concept once we understand how deletion works. In most cases, trashing a file (in this case an SMS or MMS message) doesn't really erase it from the system; or at least it doesn't do it right away.Your device will simply mark this file as inactive. In other words, it is made invisible and replaceable. As you continue using your device and adding new files, these start replacing "deleted" content. In other words, it is best that you stop using your phone if you really need to recover that text message, because it may get permanently wiped out after some time. Carriers often have all your texts stored This is not necessarily a solution, but it is still information that may be helpful in some cases. As it turns out, many wireless providers store your text messaging records and other data for extended periods of time (here is a chart with carrier data retention periods). The only problem is they will likely not release that information to you simply because you accidentally deleted something.However, some carriers may cooperate with the police if necessary. These companies have also been known to help users facing legal complications, as these messages could serve as evidence in a court of law. This won't help most of us, though, so let's move on to what you can do to actually obtain results. So it's all lost and you really, really want that text message. It may be possible to obtain it by using data recovery software, which can scan your phone for "deleted" content and retrieve whatever may still be in existence.After you have the software, the process is pretty straight forward. Just install the program on your PC and run it. The only trick is that you will need to turn USB Debugging on. This option is under Developer Tools, in your Android Settings app.Each software has its own specific steps. Some will require you to use an Android app to load everything to the computer, while other services can have the PC software do all the heavy lifting. Just make sure you follow instructions for your specific program.After you let the program do its thing, you should be presented with all the files you can recover. Making sure this doesn't happen again You just realized this whole retrieving deleted text messages isn't exactly an easy feat. And it shouldn't really be… you just got rid of the darn thing! You just happen to be lucky computing devices work a certain way. Regardless, the best way to solve something is to prevent it. There's many apps that can help you backup your text messages, as well as other content. Let's take a look at some of them.This is among the most popular backup apps of its kind, with over 5 million downloads and a 4.5-star rating. And it's no wonder the service managed to get such a good reputation – it is free to download and happens to have a pretty full set of features.For starters, this application can store your text messages in XML format. It's also very convenient that the software can save your data both locally and in the cloud. It supports Email, Google Drive and Dropbox (through an add-on app). To make matters even more exciting, users can even schedule automatic updates, making sure you don't forget to store your SMS messages manually.Need something that covers a bit more than SMS messages? Easy Backup & Restore does very well for being a free app. This is a full-fledged backup solution that can store your SMS, MMS, call logs, calendar, bookmarks, dictionary contacts and apps.It also happens to support SD cards, Gmail, Google Drive, Dropbox, Box and even OneDrive. And yes, you can also schedule your automatic updates. And if you have root access, Easy Backup & Restore can also handle apps and app data. Conclusion Sadly, there's not much else we can do, unless you want to pay very hefty amounts of cash to data specialists so they can take your phone into a lab and dissect it. These tips should keep you pretty well covered, though. Just be sure to be a bit more careful next time, and use the preventive applications we told you about!Don't head out just yet! Join the conversation and let us know if you have ever needed to recover a deleted message (or any other file). How did you solve this issue? Have you used any of the above-mentioned methods before?