# Minister tells hospitals they must have virus-free computer systems

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*The Royal Melbourne Hospital was hit by a computer virus on Monday. Photo: Joe Armao*

Victorian hospitals are responsible for ensuring their computer systems are safe from cyber attacks and viruses, Health Minister Jill Hennessy said in the wake of crippling virus which hit one of Melbourne's biggest hospitals.

On Monday a computer virus hit Royal Melbourne Hospital computers, throwing pathology and radiology departments into chaos and forcing the hospital to send major trauma patients to other hospitals.

*Health minister Jill Hennessy says Victorian hospitals need to ensure their computer systems are up-to-date and virus-free. Photo: Michele Mossop*

The virus attack has exposed the use of out-dated operational systems and prompted renewed calls for greater investment in hospitals' information technology systems.

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The Australian Medical Association has called for a $50 million IT investment boost from the state government over the next three years.

On Wednesday, Ms Hennessy announced a $10 million fund for hospitals to use to upgrade IT.



*Victorian Health Minister Jill Hennessy says hospitals have a responsibility to 'make sure that their systems are fit for purpose and secure'. Photo: Penny Stephens*

But asked about whether she was confident hospitals could withstand future attacks she said it was up to hospitals to ensure safety.

"Hospitals do have a responsibility to make sure that their systems are fit for purpose and secure.

"I know that at Royal Melbourne they have worked very hard in order to address these issues," Ms Hennessy said.

"It is important to have assets audited every year, and that it is the boards that are required to make sure their assets are fit for purpose."

Traditionally IT funding for hospitals comes from a health service's operational budget.

"We recognise hospitals do need additional support," she said.

Labor has also blamed savage cuts to the health sector over the past four years.

"We have got to keep investing," Ms Hennessey said. "But hospitals also have the operational responsibility to make sure their systems are secure."

The Minister is confident Royal Melbourne will "learn every lesson" from the virus attack this week.

The Victorian Healthcare Association, which represents hospitals, acknowledged that health services were responsible for IT but chief executive Tom Symondson said hospitals were constrained by budgets and a failure over time to provide adequate funding.

"While hospitals have a responsibility to monitor and maintain their IT equipment they are bound by the very limited funding they receive from government," Mr Symondson said.

"Previous investments haven't come close to meeting the IT needs of the sector and the time has passed for up-to-date IT systems and technology to be seen as an optional extra.

"We call on the government to use the upcoming State Budget as an opportunity to significantly invest in the technology that Victorians need and deserve."

Normal use of IT at Royal Melbourne is slowly returning.

On Wednesday morning an email to staff said that critical infrastructure was up and running but some PCs were not working.

Critical patient areas are being prioritised to be fixed, including the Intensive Care Unit and pharmacy.

Ms Hennessy was at the Alfred hospital on Wednesday morning to announce that 20 hospitals would share in $35 million to replace ageing medical equipment with state-of the art models.

The state Labor government also launched an attack on the Turnbull government over mooted changes to pathology and diagnostic services .

*Submitted by Ruth Edge – Cardinia Shire Council*