An ECU community survey has uncovered that one in five small and medium businesses have no virus protection installed on their computers, according to the University’s Security Research Institute director Professor Craig Valli.

Professor Valli and his team have been questioning business operators across Wanneroo, Yanchep and Joondalup to discover how vulnerable they are to cyber attack.

The pilot project, which is jointly funded by the two councils and ECU, has provided the University with a unique opportunity to investigate how local enterprise use the Internet.

"Basically one in five businesses is highly vulnerable to worm-based attack, which is pretty bad really when you think about it," Professor Valli said.

"A lot of small to medium businesses will have all the data to do with the business sitting on the home computer they share with their kids, and will be bringing USB sticks in and out, so the risk profile is quite high."

The ECU team is using an online, 15-question survey to pinpoint how businesses are exposing themselves to hackers.

"It’s a small survey but it tells us a lot about what they do and don’t know and where there are gaps,” Professor Valli said.

The researchers found that 93 per cent of people used smart phones or tablets for their businesses, but 77 per cent of those people failed to protect the devices from cyber attack.

“People need to be more careful,” Professor Valli said.

“It’s cause for concern because they will be attacked.

“The actual growth of virus and attack on phones is continuing to increase at very high rates.”

Professor Valli said he intends to expand the study to other parts of Perth and the team plan to hold free cyber security education workshops over the coming year.

The ECU team have also been advising planners how to better secure the internet for a sustainable city urban development scheme, called Yanchep Beach Joint Venture.

“If we are successful in getting the bidding from the government, we will develop community initiatives in cyber security and that will build off the back of the survey.

“What we’ll do is we’ll run targeted workshops to improve people’s awareness.

“This is our way of giving back to the community.”

For more information, call 134 328, email engagement@ecu.edu.au or visit www.ecu.edu.au