For laptop owners (or anyone using WiFi to connect to the internet):

For Windows Vista and 7 and Windows 8.1: When you connect to a WiFi network in a public setting, make sure you use the "public" profile. Unless you completely trust all the computing devices that connect to a network, treat it as "public." Also, check to make sure that your public profile is set to appropriate restrictive settings. See the attached Windows 7 screen shots (below) which are very similar on Windows Vista and Windows 8.1 [Open these from your control panel’s Network and Sharing, then Advanced Sharing Settings]

![Windows Network and Sharing Screenshot]

If you are doing any sensitive work, the best advice is to connect using a VPN (a virtual private network). A VPN is the only way I know of that can protect against hackers on public networks. It’s easy to hack into other computers. Look up the Firesheep add-on for Firefox. If you work for an organization, ask that organization’s IT department for advice.

Here is a reasonable roundup of VPN products. I have not tested any of them:

http://compnetworking.about.com/od/vpn/tp/vpnsoftwarefree.htm

For any computer, laptop or desktop:

You might consider your LAN (a "local area network") to be public or not depending on your level of trust of other computers on the same network. I bring other folks’ computers (probably infected) into my home to work on them. I have just set up my production computer to treat the LAN as a "public" network.

Got teenagers or visitors? Give them their own WiFi network (a guest network).

When setting up a WiFi network at home:

**MOST IMPORTANT**: Set an encryption key using WPA or, better, WPA2. If you only have WEP, replace the WiFi router with one that supports WPA or WPA2. WEP is next to worthless.

**SECOND**: Change the administrative credentials for the router itself. The default user name and password are easily found on the Internet. Write down the user name and password and tape them to your router.

**THIRD**: Update the WiFi router firmware.
FOURTH: If you have guests, give them a separate WiFi network. Many WiFi routers support two WiFi networks. Encrypt both of them with WPA or WPA2 encryption keys (a different key for each network). Write down the encryption keys and tape them to your router.

Here is one inexpensive WiFi router that you might consider for home use:


Here's one writeup that's more complete:

http://ask-leo.com/how_do_i_use_an_open_wifi_hotspot_safely.html