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UXSS: Universal Cross-Site Scripting in Browsers and Extensions

UXSS is a browser, extension, or privileged component flaw that can violate origin isolation across sites. It is not an ordinary bug in one web application.

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Universal cross-site scripting (UXSS) is a vulnerability in a browser, extension, embedded webview, or other privileged client component that lets attacker-controlled content execute with the security origin of unrelated websites. Unlike ordinary XSS, the vulnerable component—not necessarily the target website—breaks the same-origin boundary.

Researchers from the USENIX Security study FuzzOrigin describe UXSS as a browser vulnerability that can make an attacker's script execute on web pages loaded by the browser.

UXSS vs. ordinary XSS

- **Stored or reflected XSS:** a particular website mishandles attacker-controlled data and runs it in that site's origin.

- **DOM-based XSS:** unsafe client-side code in a web application turns data into executable markup or script.
- **UXSS:** a browser-level or privileged component flaw may cross origins and affect otherwise unrelated sites.

A normal site patch can fix its own XSS. A true UXSS flaw generally requires a browser, operating-system, extension, or webview update.

How UXSS can happen

- incorrect origin assignment during navigation, redirects, or special URL handling;
- browser UI, parser, IPC, or policy mistakes that bypass same-origin checks;
- an extension with broad host permissions injecting unsafe content into many sites;
- an application webview exposing privileged native interfaces or using outdated browser code.

Potential impact

Depending on the flaw and active sessions, an attacker may read page data, perform actions as the user, alter forms, access non-HttpOnly tokens, or capture information entered on another site. Browser isolation, process sandboxing, cookie attributes, and site defenses can reduce some impact, but they do not make an unpatched browser flaw harmless.

What users should do

1. **Install browser and OS updates promptly.** Restart the browser to ensure the new version is running.
2. **Review extensions.** Remove unknown or unnecessary add-ons and question new permission requests to read and change data on all websites.
3. **Use supported software.** Retire browsers, embedded apps, and devices that no longer receive security fixes.

4. **Respond to confirmed exposure.** Revoke sessions and change sensitive credentials from a known-clean browser if a trusted advisory says the flaw was exploited or an extension was malicious.

Odd popups or a password manager refusing to fill do not prove UXSS; phishing, ordinary XSS, browser hijacking, or a different hostname are more common explanations.

When assessing a report, record the affected product and exact version, extension list, operating system, proof-of-concept prerequisites, and whether the behavior crosses two genuinely different origins. Reproduce only in an isolated test profile without real accounts or confidential data.

Guidance for organizations and developers

- enforce rapid browser and webview patching and maintain version inventory;
- allow-list extensions and review their permissions and update ownership;
- use separate profiles or managed environments for privileged administration;
- websites should still use CSP, contextual output encoding, CSRF defenses, restrictive framing, and secure cookie attributes as defense in depth;
- security researchers should test only authorized targets and report browser flaws through coordinated disclosure.

UXSS FAQ

Can clearing cookies fix UXSS?

No. It may invalidate some local sessions, but the vulnerable browser or extension must be patched or removed.

Does disabling JavaScript solve it?

It may reduce some exploit paths but can break sites and is not a reliable substitute for the vendor fix.

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