

Airgapping at home with Tails

A computer that has never seen your seed while a network interface was live. You can build that on a kitchen table. That airgapped birth of the key is the foundation of self-custody.

Airgap does mean

- Networking disabled on the Tails welcome screen, before the desktop appears.
- The seed exists in RAM only. Shutdown wipes it.
- Data crosses the gap as files on a clean USB (PSBT, descriptor, verified binaries).
- The household computer stays watch-only: xpubs and the descriptor, never seeds.

Airgap does not mean

- “I turned Wi-Fi off after Sparrow opened.”
- The family laptop’s installed disk, even if you unplug Ethernet.
- Photographing a seed “just to be safe.”
- A password manager, printer, or cloud note as backup.

Prepare Tails on a trusted online computer

- 01** Download the Tails ISO only from the official Tails site. Fetch the signing key from more than one published source.
- 02** Verify the ISO signature and checksum before you flash. If verification fails, stop.
- 03** Flash Tails to its own USB with the official installer. Label it TAILS. Never mix it with the data USB.
- 04** On a separate clean USB, copy only already-verified files: Sparrow .tar.gz, optional Electrum, local Ian Coleman HTML.

Every offline session at home

- 01** Insert Tails. Boot. Set Networking to Disabled. Start Tails.
- 02** Plug in the data USB. Copy only what you need onto the live session.
- 03** Convert entropy, restore one seed, sign one PSBT, or export the descriptor.
- 04** Copy results back to the data USB. Shut Tails down fully. Wait for the screen to go dark before unplugging.
- 05** Never load two seeds in one session. Never turn networking on while a seed is in memory.

Two-machine rule at home. Online computer: watch-only Sparrow, builds the spend, broadcasts. Offline Tails: loads exactly one seed, signs, exports the PSBT, shuts down. The only secret that crosses a USB is a signature file — not a seed. A networked machine with a seed loaded is a single point of failure. Treat that session as burned.