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Generated on 15/11/2026 00:16

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SSH on your hosting account: keys instead of passwords, and staying safe

Accounts, Passwords & E-mail

CODE	VERSION	COUNTRY · LANGUAGE
RLX-AO-KB-1500	v2026.10.18	Angola · English

Interweb Angola
RLX Angola, Lda. · Group RLX Holdings
Tax ID (NIF) 500 260 5724 · Commercial registration no. 26464-25/250724

https://www.meu.interweb.ao/knowledgebase/1500

SSH on your hosting account: keys instead of passwords, and staying safe

Accounts, Passwords & E-mail Created on **October 10, 2026** Updated on **October 18, 2026** 3 min read



The short answer: SSH gives you a command line on your account, and it is as powerful as it is dangerous if the password is weak. The safe way is to use **a key** instead of the password: you create a pair of files on your computer, hand the public half to cPanel and keep the private one to yourself. Whoever lacks the private one cannot get in, however well they guess the password. This is about a shared hosting account; on a VPS with root the rules differ.

First, does your account have SSH?

Every shared hosting plan has SSH access. You see “SSH Access” in the Security section of cPanel, and you can open cPanel’s own Terminal (see **the cPanel Terminal**). If the option is missing or says it is disabled, ask us through a support ticket. On our shared servers SSH does not use the usual port 22, but **2299**.

Connecting with a key

1. **Create the key pair on your own computer** (not on the server): in a terminal, `ssh-keygen -t ed25519`. Accept the default name and **choose a passphrase** for the key. You end up with a private file and another ending in `.pub`, the public one.

2. **Import the public key in cPanel.** Under “SSH Access”, choose to manage keys and import a key: paste the contents of the `.pub` file. The exact button names may vary a little with the cPanel version.

3. **Authorize the key.** Once imported, the key shows in the list and has to be authorized. Without this step it exists, but opens nothing.

4. **Connect,** giving the port: `ssh -p 2299 username@server`. The username and server are in **your cPanel access details**. If the connection asks for the key’s passphrase, it is working.

The private key never leaves your computer.
Do not send it by e-mail or message, do not put it in a public repository, do not keep it in the site folder. If you lose track of it, remove the public key in cPanel and create another. On Linux and macOS the private file should be readable by you alone (`chmod 600` on the file), or SSH refuses to use it.

Rules of good use

Rule	Why
One key per computer	If a laptop is lost, you remove only its key.
A passphrase on the key	If someone copies the file, they still need the phrase.
Do not repeat failed attempts	The firewall counts failures and blocks the address: see **why your IP gets blocked**. If you were blocked, **unblock it**.
Prefer SFTP to FTP	It uses the same encrypted connection. See **SFTP instead of FTP**.
Watch what you run	A command has the power it has. If you do not know what it does, do not run it. A line picked up from a forum can wipe the whole site.

On shared hosting you do not control the SSH server's configuration, so you cannot, for example, switch off password login for everybody: the key strengthens **your** account, but the account password still exists. That is why the cPanel password should be long and unique, and the account should have two-step verification where available. On a VPS the conversation is different: see **how to change the SSH port without locking yourself out**.

NEED A HAND?

Cannot find SSH in your account, or the connection refuses the key? Tell us the domain and the error message.

Open a support ticket →

SEE ALSO

- **The cPanel Terminal: a command line with nothing to install** →
- **SFTP instead of FTP** →

Your cPanel access details →

Why your IP gets blocked by the firewall →

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