



April 2020

## Key Information on Telecommunications Connectivity during the COVID-19 Pandemic

### COMMITTEE ON ENERGY & COMMERCE

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Before the coronavirus pandemic hit, approximately [28 million American households](#) did not use the internet from home. This problem is particularly acute when work, school, and civic engagement have moved almost fully online in response to social distancing measures recommended and mandated at the state and local level.

Social distancing has resulted in [greater internet usage](#) for telework, distance learning, media consumption, and social engagement. According to the [Federal Communications Commission \(FCC\)](#), fixed broadband providers have seen network usage rise 20-35 percent in the past several weeks, while usage on cellular networks has increased 10-20 percent. The increased demand is primarily occurring in suburban, exurban, and residential areas, and during daytime hours. Despite these increases, no significant problems have been reported.

[Congress](#) and the [FCC](#) have urged communications companies to provide flexibility for consumers during the COVID-19 public health emergency and many communications companies, large and small, have responded. Information about the efforts of the large, national communications providers are provided below. Smaller, regional communications providers are also offering discounts and increased help.

#### **KEEP AMERICANS CONNECTED PLEDGE**

Numerous internet service providers have signed the FCC's "Keep Americans Connected Pledge," committing, for a period of sixty days starting on March 13, to:

- (1) not terminate service to any residential or small business customers due to their inability to pay bills due to coronavirus disruptions;
- (2) waive late fees that residential and small business customers incur because of hardships due to coronavirus; and
- (3) open their WiFi hotspots to any American who needs them.

All of the major communications service providers have signed on to this pledge, though, notably, some of the companies require customers to proactively reach out to ask for a waiver of late fees. More information on which providers are participating can be found here:

<https://www.fcc.gov/keep-americans-connected>

## **DATA CAPS AND DATA OR VOICE OVERTAGE**

*Home Broadband Service:* Many communications providers have lifted data caps that normally would result in charges or slower speeds if a customer exceeds the usage allowance included with their plan. Notably, some companies, such as Charter and Verizon, regularly do not impose data caps on their home broadband plans.

Companies that have waived their normal home broadband data caps include:

- AT&T home internet service
- CenturyLink home internet service
- Comcast home internet service
- Cox home internet service (has suspended data usage overage charges and implemented credits for certain data usage plan participants through May 15)

*Wireless Service:* Some companies have agreed to waive charges for exceeding voice and data caps for customers facing financial hardships due to the coronavirus. To receive such a waiver, many providers are requiring customers to call to make the request.

National Wireless Providers:

- AT&T will waive data, voice and text overages incurred by residential postpaid wireless customers between March 13 and May 13. Customers must contact AT&T at <https://www.att.com/help/covid-19/waive-overage-fee/>.
- U.S. Cellular is automatically waiving overage charges for prepaid and postpaid customers on plans with data allowances and it has stopped slowing customers on 2 gigabytes (GB) and 6GB data plans once they reach their data allowance.
- Verizon will waive overages incurred by consumer and small business customers between March 16 and May 13. Customers must contact Verizon by filling out a form located here: <https://www.verizonwireless.com/support/covid-19-faqs/>.

## **ADDITIONAL DATA ALLOWANCES**

Some wireless providers are also giving customers additional allotments of data. This includes additional data when customers use their mobile device as a hotspot, which is typically limited by providers, even for customers that have unlimited data plans.

- From April 2 through May 13, AT&T is increasing by 15GB each month the mobile hotspot data available to wireless customers on unlimited plans. For prepaid customers, it is automatically adding an additional 10GB of data per month for two months. Through May 22, schools that activate new lines for data-only devices such as tablets and hotspots will receive free wireless service at no cost for 60 days. For more information, see <https://www.business.att.com/content/dam/attbusiness/collateral/att-wireless-broadband-accessmylan-education-offer-flyer.pdf>.

- T-Mobile is giving unlimited data to customers with service plans that include an allotment of data, for 60 days beginning on March 13. Customers with mobile hotspot data included with their plans can also receive an additional 10GB of data per month for two months, upon request at myT-Mobile.com or the myT-Mobile app by adding the COVID-19 Response High Speed Smartphone Mobile HotSpot feature for each voice line. The company is also working with its Lifeline partners to provide customers up to 5GB per month of extra data, through May 13.
- U.S. Cellular is automatically providing customers on Unlimited Everyday and Even Better plans with an additional 15GB of hotspot data.
- Until April 30, Verizon is automatically adding an additional 15 gigabits of data for all wireless consumers and small businesses and an additional 15 gigabits of mobile hotspot data for customers on unlimited plans.

### **FREE CALLING**

- T-Mobile is offering free international calls to landline, and in some cases, mobile numbers, in countries highly impacted by coronavirus.
- Through April 30, Verizon is offering free domestic calls to wireless customers on limited-minute plans, and free international calling to certain countries affected by the coronavirus.

### **LOW-COST INTERNET PLANS**

Many home broadband providers offer internet plans at a reduced price for certain low-income customers. Each company has different terms of eligibility, which can be found on their websites, and some are also offering discounts on laptop and desktop computers and free or reduced installation and initiation costs. These plans often cap speeds at certain rates and allow a set data allowance each month.

- For households that currently lack internet access, Altice is offering its Altice Advantage plan for free for two months to new customers with a K-12 and/or college student in their home. For more information and to enroll, see [www.alticeadvantageinternet.com](http://www.alticeadvantageinternet.com). Altice is also offering schools and students free Business WiFi access in the New York tri-state area for students to use school-issued devices. For more information, see [www.optimum.com/coronavirus](http://www.optimum.com/coronavirus).
- AT&T is offering expanded eligibility for Access to AT&T to all households with incomes at 135 percent or less than the federal poverty guidelines and to families participating in the National School Lunch Program and Head Start Program. New Access customers can receive free service for two months. For more information and to enroll, see <https://m.att.com/shopmobile/internet/access/index.html>. For AT&T wireless prepaid

customers, the company is offering a new plan that includes 2GB of data per month and unlimited talk and text for \$15 per month. For more information, see [https://about.att.com/newsroom/2020/covid\\_19\\_att\\_prepaid.html](https://about.att.com/newsroom/2020/covid_19_att_prepaid.html).

- Charter is offering new customers access to Spectrum broadband and free in-home WiFi for 60 days to any household with K-12 or college students, or an educator. Charter also continues to offer its reduced-rate internet plans to qualifying low-income households. For more information and to enroll, see [www.spectrum.com/browse/content/spectrum-internet-assist](http://www.spectrum.com/browse/content/spectrum-internet-assist).
- Comcast is offering two free months of its Internet Essentials plan to new eligible customers, and increasing the upload and download speeds available on the plan. For more information and to enroll, see [www.internetessentials.com](http://www.internetessentials.com).
- Cox is offering two months of free service of Connect2Compete, its low-cost internet offering for certain families with school-aged children. It also increased the upload and download speeds available to Connect2Compete customers, as well as customers on Starter and StraightUp Internet plans. For more information and to enroll, see [www.cox.com/residential/internet/connect2compete.html](http://www.cox.com/residential/internet/connect2compete.html).
- Verizon launched a new discount for FIOS home internet service, available for new customers who meet the qualifications for the Lifeline program. Verizon's current Lifeline customers will have all billing charges waived for two months. For more information, see [www.verizon.com/support/consumer/account/manage-account/lifeline-discount](http://www.verizon.com/support/consumer/account/manage-account/lifeline-discount).

### **FCC ACTIONS TO ENSURE THAT AMERICANS STAY CONNECTED**

- The FCC has waived – on a temporary basis – certain rules related to universal service fund programs, including those that support low-income consumers and schools and libraries (e.g., temporarily [lifted the rules](#) preventing providers from giving devices to rural health care providers and schools and libraries; temporarily lifted rules related to verifying low-income consumers enrolled in the [Lifeline program](#); and revised tariffs to allow certain providers to [waive certain fees](#) for customers experiencing economic challenges).
- It has also granted the [major](#) national [wireless](#) providers temporary access to spectrum to ensure their networks could handle increased traffic, and granted temporary access to spectrum to certain [wireless internet](#) providers to meet increased demand for rural Americans.
- Most recently, and at the direction of Congress in the CARES Act, the FCC [voted to approve](#) a \$200 million program to immediately fund telecommunications services, devices, and broadband connectivity to health care providers to deliver telehealth programs responding to the coronavirus pandemic.

## **CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS AND COMPANY CONTACT INFORMATION**

The FCC has a duty to take complaints and work on behalf of consumers who have disputes with their service providers, including issues with service quality or billing. Complaints can be filed online at <https://consumercomplaints.fcc.gov/hc/en-us> or via telephone at (888) 225-5322.

Below is a list of websites and contact information for customer service agents:

Altice

[www.alticeusa.com/together](http://www.alticeusa.com/together)

Optimum (866) 218-3259 /Suddenlink 877-694-9474

AT&T

<https://about.att.com/pages/COVID-19.html>

(800) 288-2020

Centurylink

<https://news.centurylink.com/covid-19>

(866) 642-0444

Charter

<https://corporate.charter.com/newsroom/charter-expands-free-60-day-spectrum-broadband-internet-and-wifi-offer-to-include-educators-who-are-new-spectrum-subscribers>

(833) 267-6094

Comcast

<https://corporate.comcast.com/covid-19>

(800) XFINITY

Cox

<https://www.cox.com/residential/support/coronavirus-response.html?campcode=tnt-home-alert>

(800) 234-3993

T-Mobile

<https://www.t-mobile.com/brand/ongoing-updates-covid-19>

(800) T-MOBILE

U.S. Cellular

<https://www.uscellular.com/covid-19>

(888) 944-9400

Verizon

<https://www.verizon.com/about/news/our-response-coronavirus>

(800) 837-4966 / (800) 922-0204 (wireless)