

Widespread internet outages hit northeast U.S.

January 26 2021, by Tali Arbel, Matt O'brien and Frank Bajak



In this Aug. 11, 2019, file photo, an iPhone displays the Facebook app in New Orleans. Users across the northeast U.S. reported widespread internet outages Tuesday, Jan. 26, 2021. Verizon reported a fiber cut in Brooklyn via Twitter, although it's not clear if that issue is responsible for the entire outage. According to DownDetector and user reports on Twitter, the problem appears to extend from Washington to Boston, and is affecting internet and cloud providers as well as a number of Google services, Facebook and other major sites. (AP Photo/Jenny Kane, File)

Internet users across the northeast U.S. experienced widespread outages for several hours Tuesday, interrupting work and school because of an unspecified Verizon network issue.

"An internet issue impacting the quality of our Fios service throughout the Northeast has been resolved," said spokesman Rich Young in an emailed statement Tuesday afternoon. He said service levels "are returning to normal" and the company is investigating what happened. The service interruptions were unrelated to a cut fiber in Brooklyn, New York, which caused problems for people in the area.

There are about 6.5 million Fios internet customers.

People posting on Twitter reported having issues connecting with various online services in the region stretching from Washington, D.C., to Boston. That densely populated area includes key U.S. government services as well as major financial companies such as Fidelity Investments.

Disruptions to internet services are always a hassle, but have become even more excruciating as the pandemic forces millions of people to work from home and students to attend school remotely.

Diana Gaspar's daughter in New York couldn't connect to her online classroom because their home internet was spotty for a couple of hours in the afternoon, although her daughter was able to log in with Gaspar's phone.

"We didn't see it as a major issue," Gaspar said. "The only inconvenience was me not having my phone."

For the Fairfax County Public Schools in the Washington, D.C., suburbs, teachers and students found workarounds, such as switching to another instruction platform if one wasn't working, said spokeswoman Lucy Caldwell. When her third-grade daughter's teacher couldn't log on to the education software they were using, a gym teacher came on to tell kids to do independent learning instead, said Fairfax parent Tracy Compton.

"My daughter came to me and I had to stop working and I had to work with her to do the assignment," Compton said, noting that frustrating tech issues are not unusual with remote learning.

At Galvin Middle School in Wakefield, Massachusetts, a suburb north of Boston, teachers sent students pen-and-paper assignments if there were internet problems, said Trish Dellanno, reached at the school by phone. "Teachers have been able to keep on moving. They're going old school."

The outage affected internet and cloud providers as well as major sites such as Google and Facebook. Amazon, whose web services division powers a wide range of online services, indicated its network wasn't the cause of the problem and that connectivity issues for its Amazon Web Services customers were resolved around 12:45 p.m., after an hour and a half. Google said it also had not found issues with its own services and was investigating.

The East Coast outages began at 11:25 a.m. local time and recovery began at 12:37 p.m., according to Doug Madory, director of internet analysis at Kentik, a network monitoring company. He reported a 12% drop in traffic volume to Verizon.

Madory said he did not yet know if other carriers were impacted. Comcast, another major internet service provider, said it had not observed problems with its network Tuesday. AT&T said it does not supply home internet in the northeast and customers were not affected.

Cary Wiedemann, a network engineer who had connectivity problems at his home in Northern Virginia, said that some online services could have been disrupted even if your home internet still worked, if the issue was with the backbone of Verizon's network.

"If Outlook works but YouTube doesn't, whose fault is it? Verizon's fault. But that's not obvious from the onset," he said.

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