

How to get internet access even when a storm knocks out power (and Wi-Fi) at home

August 14 2024, by Renee Umsted, The News & Observer



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Hurricanes, tropical storms and even severe thunderstorms can lead to power outages.

You know the drill. (But if you don't, here's our guide to preparing for [power outages](#).) Hopefully, you'll have planned ahead and made sure your electronics and portable chargers were charged.

You'll then unplug any unnecessary appliances or devices to prevent damage in case of an electrical surge. You'll report the outage to your power company. You'll keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible. You'll have flashlights ready to go for everyone in your home.

And sadly, without power, your home Wi-Fi system won't work. But that doesn't mean you won't be able to access the internet.

Customers of major wireless carriers have ways to continue surfing the web even when they lose internet at home.

How Verizon customers can access the web

If you have Verizon, there are several ways to go online even if you lose power at your home, Winnie Wright, Verizon's head of communications for the Atlantic South market, said in an email to The News & Observer:

Hot spot devices, such as Verizon's battery-powered Orbic Speed Mobile Hotspot, will continue to work as long as the core cell network infrastructure has not been affected. The company has generators and backup batteries at its cell sites to ensure connectivity even if commercial power is lost.

Phones with [hot spots](#) can be used to help connect devices such as laptops and tablets to the web.

Any phone, laptop or tablet with cell connection will have [internet access](#) as long as Verizon's cell sites are operational.

How much does that cost? Verizon's Unlimited Ultimate and Unlimited Plus wireless plans come with hot spot data, 60GB and 30GB, respectively. The Unlimited Welcome plan doesn't include any hot spot data, but customers with that plan can add 100 gigabytes of monthly data for \$10 each month.

If customers on the unlimited plans use all of the monthly allotted data, they can add 100GB of data for \$10 each month. If they choose not to pay for more data, they can use as much data as they want for the rest of the month, but speeds will be reduced.

How AT&T customers can access the web

Wind can damage antennas and hardware on wireless cell sites, but a power outage is more likely to hinder wireless operations, Ann Elsas, AT&T's lead public relations manager for the Southeast, told The News & Observer in an email.

Before a storm comes, AT&T prepares its network by:

- Testing high-capacity backup batteries at cell sites
- Distributing extended battery life and portable generators and maintaining fixed generators
- Fueling up generators at cell sites and switching facilities
- Placing generators in locations where they can be deployed after the storm passes

After Hurricane Florence in 2018, AT&T sent trucks to the Raleigh area that featured charging stations and Wi-Fi connectivity, in addition to repairing and restoring service as conditions allowed.

When the regional networks are functioning, AT&T customers can access the internet using their wireless device or a hot spot device.

How much does that cost? AT&T's unlimited plans include hot spot data. The Unlimited Premium plan offers 60GB per line each month, the Unlimited Extra plan comes with 30GB per line each month, and the Unlimited Starter plan comes with 5GB of data per month.

If the data included in the plan is used, customers can still access mobile hot spot data at lower speeds suitable for texting and emailing, but not streaming. An additional 10GB of data can be purchased for \$15 each month.

Hot spot devices, which offer higher data allowances than a wireless plan with hot spot data, have rechargeable batteries. As long as they're charged and the wireless network is functioning, they allow customers to access the internet on another device.

How Spectrum customers can access the web

If a storm knocks out power, power companies first have to restore it and verify that areas are safe (in case of any downed lines) before communications personnel can begin working to bring back connectivity.

A Spectrum spokesperson told The News & Observer in an email that Spectrum teams sometimes accompany power companies to neighborhoods to make this process as quick as possible.

Spectrum customers who have Unlimited and Unlimited Plus mobile plans get access to unlimited talk, text and data, but once they use a certain amount of data (30GB or 50GB, respectively), they'll experience reduced speeds.

Both Unlimited plans also include mobile hot spot data. But again, once the customer reaches the 5GB or 10GB threshold, depending on their plan, the internet speed will be reduced.

Spectrum customers with the By the Gig data option get 1GB of data each month and are charged \$5 for each additional gigabyte (whether or not they use the entire gig), up to 5GB. After that, reduced speeds kick in.

Unlike other companies, Spectrum does not offer hot spot devices that can be used to connect phones, laptops and tablets to the internet.

How T-Mobile customers can access the web

Like other companies, T-Mobile has taken steps to prepare its network for storms.

For example, the provider is adding permanent backup power solutions such as generators and batteries to help keep people connected. The company has also turned on its new spectrum to boost coverage and capacity for nearly 60 million people across the U.S.

After storms pass, T-Mobile can send its disaster response vehicles that supplement coverage and restore connectivity through satellite and microwave backhaul.

T-Mobile offers wireless plans and hot spot devices that allow customers to access the internet.

The carrier's Go5G Next and Go 5G Plus plans include 50GB of high-speed mobile hot spot data. The Go5G plan includes 15GB of high-speed hot spot data, and after reaching that threshold, the customer gets unlimited data at reduced speeds. Customers with the Essentials plan get unlimited 3G hot spot data, with the option to add high-speed hot spot data.

Depending on the plan, customers will get either unlimited premium data

or a certain amount included, after which time the [customer](#) may experience slower speeds.

T-Mobile customers may also choose to purchase a rechargeable hot spot device that can connect multiple devices, such as phones, laptops and tablets, to the internet.

How streaming, texting, calling and surfing the web use data

Different activities require different amounts of data, so if you're trying to figure out how to make your allotted data last the longest, here's what you need to know:

- Streaming typically uses the most data, especially with high resolution videos.
- Surfing the web generally uses less data than streaming, but more than texting or calling.
- Texting and calling typically require minimal data, though video calls may use more data than a text.
- A good way to save data is to connect to Wi-Fi as much as possible.

2024 The News & Observer. Distributed at Tribune Content Agency, LLC.

Citation: How to get internet access even when a storm knocks out power (and Wi-Fi) at home (2024, August 14) retrieved 14 August 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2024-08-internet-access-storm-power-wi.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.