Staying connected during COVID-19

The need for physical distancing during COVID-19 means that we are relying more than ever on our home and mobile broadband connections to live, learn, work and play.

Network operators are confident that they can meet this increased demand. We can all support this by playing our part in helping to manage how we use our broadband.

To support home Wi-Fi networks across the country we have put together a few tips to get the best out of your broadband and what to do if you have been financially impacted by COVID-19.

Tips to improve your performance

The time of day you go online, the number of people in your home using the internet at the same time, and the location of your modem or router, can all play a part in slowing down or improving your connection.

Router location, location, location

→ A Wi-Fi connection weakens as your mobile or laptop gets further away from your router, so if possible, put your router closest to where you use the internet most.

→ It is best to place your router off the ground and away from electronics like microwaves, cordless phones and baby monitors.

→ Plugging your computer, TV or gaming console directly into your modem/router using an ethernet cable provides better performance, but this is not always possible or practical. These cables can now be purchased as essential products at some online electronics retailers.

→ If you need to be away from your router, consider using a Wi-Fi range extender or mesh Wi-Fi router to improve the signal in rooms that are further away. These can now also be purchased as essential products at some online electronics retailers.

Timing is everything

→ If you are video calling your friends, family or colleagues and the quality of the call is not very good, consider switching off the video and just using the audio. This will use much less of your internet connection.

→ You might want to manage your household's online activity, so that you are not all carrying out data-heavy tasks (like video streaming, gaming or video calls) at the same time.

→ When watching films, consider downloading the video in advance, instead of streaming them.

→ Devices like tablets and smartphones often update in the background, so try switching Wi-Fi reception off on these when you are not using them.

Safety in numbers and letters

→ It is important to be vigilant against scammers. Netsafe has some useful information on how to spot scams online.

→ Ensure you protect your Wi-Fi with a strong password. This will not only protect your online security but may also prevent others from using your broadband and slowing it down.

→ Check whether you are using the latest version of your web browser – newer versions not only provide better security but should also work faster. You can check your browser on the Get Safe Online website.

→ With more children learning and socialising online, Netsafe also has resources to support parents and guardians to create positive online experiences. Netsafe's Online Safety Parent Toolkit is a great place to understand the challenges young people face online and how you can best support them.

Need for speed

Search 'speed test' online to check out your connection's performance. These online tests will also capture the performance of your Wi-Fi (unless your device is plugged in) and your device, so try doing a test on different devices in different locations.

You can also check out our independent testing programme: Measuring Broadband New Zealand to compare different technologies and providers' performance. We are looking for more volunteers to help measure and improve broadband performance. Sign up to be part of the community.

Things you might see if there is a problem with your broadband performance

Large files like software updates and movies take a long time to download.

Parts of websites (like images and videos) are loading slowly, or not at all.

There are noticeable delays/pixelated images on video calls like Skype or FaceTime.

Photos are uploading slowly to social media.

Videos are buffering or in poor quality.

There are stutters and delays when gaming.

Still not fast enough – time to contact your provider?

The Government has said that telecommunications is an essential service, however there may be longer waiting times to switch plans or change service providers.

If you have tried all the above tips and you are still not getting the performance you need, before you contact your internet provider you might want to do some research online to find the best solution for you and your home.

If you do need to contact your provider try, searching their website or using their online or mobile phone app support in the first instance. If you can access support other than by the phone, please do. This will help keep phone lines available for people who need help most, particularly people in vulnerable situations.

Financial support

COVID-19 will be placing financial strain on New Zealanders, so telecommunications providers are doing what they can to ensure their customers remain connected during this difficult time.

Now, more than ever, it is important to stay connected and to ask for help when you need it. While each provider is offering slightly different support to their customers, most have removed broadband data caps. Some may also waive late payment fees for those who are unable to pay their bills on time due to financial hardship as a result of COVID-19.*

If you are worried about paying your bills, contact your provider and ask what your options are. If your income has been affected by COVID-19, the Government's financial support package includes wage subsidy support, mortgage holidays and business support. To find out more see the financial support section of the COVID-19 website or call the free helpline: 0800 779 997.

Work and Income New Zealand may be able to provide financial assistance, including help with urgent utility bills if you have no other way to pay, regardless of whether you receive a benefit or not.

Where to go if you have a dispute with your provider

Telecommunications Dispute Resolution (TDR) is a free and independent service to help consumers manage complaints about any product or service from their telecommunications provider.

Check out our fact sheet How do I resolve an issue with my broadband provider? for more information.

* Here is some more information on what the telco industry is doing to support New Zealanders during the COVID-19 lockdown.

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