

Sprint ups mobile hotspot to 50GB, turns on faster 4G LTE network before 5G arrives in 2019

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Sprint users looking for a little holiday cheer are getting some small, but nice gifts Tuesday: more hotspot data and access to a faster 4G LTE network, if you have a more recent phone.

Users of Sprint's "Unlimited Plus" and "Unlimited Freedom" will now have 50GB of full-speed 4G LTE data per month, up from 15GB for Plus and 10GB for Freedom. Users of the company's pricier "Unlimited Premium" plan will see their hotspot data rise to 100GB from 50GB.

The increased capability comes as Sprint turns on its faster, 4G LTE Advanced [network](#) nationwide. The company says the new network will deliver upload and download speeds up to twice as fast as its current 4G LTE network, assuming you have the right phone.

Those with older unlimited plans, such as the company's "Everything Data" unlimited plan that didn't have mobile hotspot, will soon be able to utilize the 50GB of hotspot data as well. The increased hotspot data is available for Plus and Premium users Tuesday with "Freedom," and "Everything Data" users able to take advantage Friday.

There is no cost to get the new hotspot data, and for Unlimited Plus and Premium users, Sprint will simply add the feature automatically. Those on some of the company's other, older unlimited plans may need to log into their accounts on Sprint's website to add the feature.

Users of the company's cheaper "Unlimited Basic" or the promotional \$15 per month "Unlimited Kickstart" plan won't be able to get the increased hotspot capacity.

"With the launch of LTE Advanced, we wanted to send a strong message that we are very confident in the capacity of our network," Roger Solé, Sprint's chief marketing officer, told USA TODAY.

"It's not the service that most customers use all the time, but its value" has increased among Sprint's customers as "kind of a lifeline for high-speed connectivity on the go."

Most new "flagship" phones that Sprint sells are compatible with the faster network, including Apple's iPhone XS and XS Max; Samsung's Galaxy S9, S9 and Note 9 and LG's V30+, G7 ThinQ and V40 ThinQ.

The company will have identifiers in its stores and online to let people know they are buying one of the devices able to tap into the faster network.

Gearing up for 5G, and its first 5G phone

Sprint's network update comes as all four major wireless carriers gear up for a big 5G push heading into 2019. Verizon has already launched its first version of 5G, known as "fixed 5G" that is designed to replace traditional home broadband, in four U.S. cities.

AT&T plans to launch its 5G network for mobile devices later this year while T-Mobile, Sprint and Verizon all plan to launch similar mobile 5G networks in 2019.

Verizon, AT&T and T-Mobile have all already launched their own LTE Advanced networks, with AT&T even calling its network "5G

Evolution."

As with its competitors, the jump to LTE Advanced and its associated technologies complement Sprint's work toward 5G.

John Saw, Sprint's chief technology officer, said having the LTE Advanced backbone coupled with other 4G network improvements that the company is still making, such as the implementation of a technology known as "massive MIMO," will allow Sprint to better prepare itself for 5G, regardless of whether or not its pending merger with T-Mobile reaches approval.

"It will be faster, simply because we're killing two birds with one stone," Saw says, crediting the "massive MIMO" deployment for helping with this process.

"When I build these MIMO sites today, I'm actually building for 5G as well," continues Saw, explaining that once the 5G software is available it will be easier for Sprint to enable across its network since the hardware is currently being put into place as part of the company's 4G LTE enhancements.

There is still no timeline for when Sprint will turn on its 5G network in its nine initial launch cities. The company will, however, have its first 5G mobile device ready for purchase around March 2019, Solé told USA TODAY.

Sprint previously announced it was working with LG on its first 5G phone for the first half of 2019.

"We hope to be the first ones to have a true, mobile 5G handset (available in) March of next year," says Solé, noting that unlike AT&T it will not be calling its LTE Advanced network and devices "5G."

"Until then, we're going to call the things what they are."

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