

Factsheet: Temporary Disaster Roaming

- Temporary Disaster Roaming (TDR) is a capability that may allow your phone to connect to another available mobile network during a natural disaster when your usual network isn't working, provided it is safe to do so, and the network can support the additional demand.
- Where it is available, it may allow you to make essential calls, send and receive text messages, and access basic data for critical websites and apps.
- TDR may provide extra connectivity in some regional and remote communities affected by natural disasters, but it isn't available everywhere and can only work where another mobile network is available and certain criteria are met.
- It's only activated when it can be done safely, helping to support connectivity while protecting the network that's still working. There will be **no extra cost** to customers.
- TDR works alongside existing Triple Zero calling, which can already be accessed through any available mobile network.
- While TDR may help in some situations, there will still be times when it can't be activated. For example, power outages remain one of the most common causes of network disruption during a natural disaster, meaning there will be times when switching it on isn't possible.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is Temporary Disaster Roaming?

Temporary Disaster Roaming (TDR) is a capability designed to help people in regional and remote locations stay connected when their usual mobile network is disrupted by a major natural disaster, such as a bushfire, cyclone or flood.

If your usual network isn't working, and another mobile network is available in the affected area, your phone may temporarily connect to that network where technically and operationally feasible, allowing you to make calls, send or receive text messages and access basic data for critical websites and apps.

TDR is different to Triple Zero calling. Australians can already call Triple Zero from any available mobile network if their own network isn't available. This existing functionality, known as 'camp-on' is built into mobile phones and works independently of TDR.

2. When can it be switched on?

Under the TDR model, its activation will be managed directly between the three carriers: Telstra, Optus and TPG Telecom, on a Network Operations Centre to Network Operations Centre (NOC-to-NOC) basis.

In situations where one mobile carrier identifies that its network has been impacted by a natural disaster, it will contact another carrier to ascertain network availability and, if available, request TDR to cover the impacted area.

3. Who decides when Temporary Disaster Roaming is switched on?

When a major natural disaster impacts mobile services, the three mobile network providers will work together as part of their existing disaster response processes. They will assess the situation and determine whether TDR can and should be activated, based on what's happening on the ground and whether the supporting network can support it safely.

4. How will I know if it's on? Will my phone show anything different?

If TDR is activated and your device is able to connect to an available participating network, your phone may connect automatically.

You may notice the network name on your phone changes to something like 'Disaster Roaming' or the name of the alternate carrier, such as 'Optus' or 'Telstra'. The exact display may vary depending on your device, but no action is required from you to connect.

5. How could it help during a disaster?

Where TDR is available and a device successfully connects to an alternative participating network, it will allow people within affected disaster areas to make and receive calls, including to mobile numbers and landlines, as well as send and receive text messages.

You may also be able to access a limited range of data services, including WhatsApp messaging, weather updates and emergency information apps. The availability of these services may vary depending on network capacity and conditions at the time.

To reduce the stress on the supporting network, data services may be limited or operate at reduced speeds. TDR is designed to support essential communications and access to critical information during a disaster, rather than high-bandwidth activities, such as video streaming. These measures help maintain network availability and keep as many people connected as possible, including staying in touch with loved ones, receiving emergency warnings and evacuation orders, and accessing other forms of disaster assistance.

6. Will my service be slower or limited during Temporary Disaster Roaming?

Possibly. The priority during TDR is to protect the supporting network from becoming overloaded. The experience may differ depending on network conditions and whether you're using your usual network or temporarily connected to another network through TDR.

If you're using your usual network, you may experience slower speeds during periods of high demand. If you're connected through TDR, data speeds may be limited to a basic level to help manage demand on the supporting network. This means simple tasks like checking a weather update, loading a map or opening a website may take longer than usual or may not always be available.

Networks are closely monitored so the service may be adjusted, restricted or switched off where necessary to help protect available network capacity and reduce the risk of wider service disruption.

7. What are the limitations?

TDR may be activated in up to three disaster-affected areas across Australia at the same time. Each area can include up to 15 mobile sites, and impacted disaster areas must be at least 400 kilometres apart.

Safety comes first when it comes to TDR. Before it can be switched on, the available network must have enough capacity to handle the extra demand. TDR will only be activated when it's safe to do and people can still make emergency calls.

8. Where does Temporary Disaster Roaming work?

TDR may only be activated in certain localised disaster-affected areas for a short, specified duration where technical and operational requirements are met. It can only work in regional and remote locations where there is unique Telstra or overlapping coverage from another mobile network. Metropolitan areas are excluded.

9. Once Temporary Disaster Roaming has been activated, how long will it be available?

TDR is designed to be run for short periods – typically around 24 hours at a time. If the natural disaster continues and people still need support to stay connected, the activation period may be extended if it can continue to be deployed safely and effectively. Once the height of a disaster has passed or where operational or network requirements change, TDR is switched off and networks return to normal.

10. Why is Temporary Disaster Roaming only temporary?

TDR is intended to support connectivity during the most critical stages of a natural disaster. As network services are restored and operational conditions change, the service may be switched off so it can remain available for other natural disaster events occurring across Australia.

11. Why isn't Temporary Disaster Roaming always available to use?

TDR may only be switched on where certain technical and operational conditions are met, including where there is at least one participating network still in operation. Often with prolonged power outages or actual physical damage from a disaster, all three carrier networks in an area will ultimately be disrupted and in such cases TDR won't be possible.

12. What happens if network conditions change?

Natural disasters can evolve quickly. While TDR is active, networks are continuously monitored. If conditions worsen – for example due to power loss or increased demand – TDR settings may need to be adjusted, restricted or switched off to help protect the supporting network and reduce the risk of broader service disruption.

13. Will Temporary Disaster Roaming work with medical devices, personal alarms, EFTPOS terminals or other connected devices?

No. TDR is intended to support connectivity on compatible smartphones during eligible natural disasters. Medical alert devices and other IoT-connected devices are not compatible with, or able to access, TDR. If you rely on a medical alert device, it's important to continue following your provider's advice and keep any existing emergency backup arrangements in place.

14. Will my phone work with Temporary Disaster Roaming?

Once it has been switched on, most Australians will not need to change any of their phone's settings to access TDR. To use TDR, your device needs to support VoLTE roaming (Voice over LTE).

Telstra: VoLTE roaming is available on all Telstra-launched handsets from 2022 onwards. If you have an older device, you can check whether it's compatible [here](#).

Optus: VoLTE roaming is available on selected Optus-launched handsets. You can check whether your device is compatible [here](#).

15. Will I be charged for calls made while using Temporary Disaster Roaming?

Yes, you'll continue to be charged in line with your existing mobile or prepaid plan, just as you normally would.

While your phone may temporarily connect to another network during a disaster, you'll still be treated as a customer of your telecommunications provider.

TDR is intended to support connectivity during eligible natural disasters when your usual network is unavailable, there are no additional roaming charges for using the service.