Windows location service and privacy – Microsoft Support

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Windows 11

Microsoft operates a location service that helps determine the precise geographic location of your Windows device. The precise location of your device allows apps to give you directions, show shops and restaurants that are near you, and more.

Many apps and services request location information from your device, and the Windows location service gives you control over which apps are allowed to access your precise location.

How the location settings work

Location services is a device-wide setting that can be controlled by the device administrator. When turned on, it enables certain Windows features—such as auto-setting the time zone or Find my device—to function properly. When this location setting is enabled, the Microsoft location service will use a combination of global positioning service (GPS), nearby wireless access points, cell towers, and your IP address (or default location) to determine your device's location. Depending on the capabilities of your device, your device's location can be determined with varying degrees of accuracy and may in some cases be determined precisely.

If you have turned on **Location services**, your device sends location information (including wireless access point information, cellular tower information, and precise GPS location if available) to Microsoft after removing any data identifying the person or device before leaving the device. This de-identified copy of location information is used to improve Microsoft location services and, in some instances, shared with our location service provider partners, currently HERE and Skyhook, to improve the location services of the provider.

Additionally, with this setting turned on, each user on the device can allow apps to use their device's location and location history to deliver location-aware services as precisely as their device supports. If

you grant a specific app access to your device’s location on the settings page, that app will have access to precise location information. Otherwise the location information provided to the app has lower accuracy. When your location is used by a location-aware app or Windows service or feature, your location information and recent location history are stored on your device.

If an app or feature accesses the device's location and you are signed in with your Microsoft account, your last-known location information is also saved to the cloud, where it is available across your devices to other apps or services that use your Microsoft account and for which you've granted permission. If you are signed in with your Microsoft account and your device cannot reliably determine your current location on its own (such as when you are in a building or basement), apps or services can use your last-known location from your location history that is stored in the cloud if it is available. Data about a Windows device's recent location history is also stored on the device even if no Microsoft account is in use, and certain apps and Windows features can access this location history.

There are some exceptions to how your device’s location can be determined that are not directly managed by the location settings.

Desktop apps are a specific type of app that won’t ask for separate permission to discover your device location information and won’t appear in the list that allows you to choose apps that can use your location. What are desktop apps? They’re usually downloaded from the internet or installed with some type of media (such as a CD, DVD, or USB storage device). They’re launched using an .EXE or .DLL file, and they typically run on your device, unlike web-based apps (which run in the cloud).

Even when you’ve turned off Location services in Windows, some apps and services could use other technologies (such as Bluetooth, Wi-Fi, cellular modem, etc.) to determine your device’s location with varying degrees of accuracy. Microsoft requires third-party software developers that develop apps for our Microsoft Store or develop apps using Microsoft tools to respect the Windows location settings unless you’ve provided any legally required consent to have the third-party developer determine your location. However, to further reduce the risk that an app or service can determine your location when the Windows device location setting is off, you should only install apps and services from trusted sources. For more comprehensive protection of your location, you could consider disabling radio-based components of your device such as Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, cellular modem, and GPS components, which might be used by an app to determine your precise location. However, doing so will also impair other experiences such as calling (including emergency calling), messaging, internet connectivity,

and connecting to peripheral devices like your headphones. Please read the privacy policies of the apps and services you've installed to learn more about how they use your device's location.

To facilitate getting help in an emergency, whenever you make an emergency call, Windows will attempt to determine and share your precise location, regardless of your location settings. In addition, your mobile operator will have access to your device's location if your device has a SIM card or is otherwise using a cellular service.

Manage location settings

Location service

1. Go to **Start** > **Settings** > **Privacy & security** > **Location**.
2. Do one of the following:
   - If you're an administrator on the device, you can use the Location services setting to control whether the location service can be used on this device. If you're not an admin on this device, you will not see this setting.
   - To control location for just your user account, switch the **Let apps access your location** setting **On** or **Off**. If "Location services is off" appears on the settings page, you won't be able to turn on the **Let apps access your location** setting for an individual user account.

Location history

Some Windows apps and services that use location info also use your location history. When the location setting is on, locations looked up by apps or services will be stored on the device for a limited time (24 hours), then deleted. Apps that have access to this info will be labeled **Uses location history** on the Location settings page.

To clear location history, either restart your device, or go to **Start** > **Settings** > **Privacy & security** > **Location** and under **Location history**, select **Clear**. Clearing the location history only clears the history on the device. Apps that accessed the history before it was cleared may have stored it elsewhere. Refer to your apps' privacy policies for more info.

To clear location history that's been stored in the cloud and is associated with your Microsoft account, go to account.microsoft.com, and make sure you're signed in to your account. Select **Clear location activity**, and then select **Clear**.

Default location

You can set a default location for your device that Windows, apps, and services can use when a more exact location can’t be detected using GPS or other methods.

To change the default location for your device, which Windows, apps, and services can use when a more exact location can't be detected

1. Go to **Start** > **Settings** > **Privacy & security** > **Location**.
2. Under **Default location**, select **Set default**.
3. The Windows Maps app will open. Follow the instructions to set or change your default location.

Allow location override

Instead of using your device’s GPS or Wi-Fi signals for location, you can allow location override, which will let apps use the location of a remote device. For example, when using Remote Desktop, you can find local printers around your client device instead of near the server that’s hosting the virtual machine you’ve connected to.

For the Allow location override setting to work, the Location services setting for both the local and remote devices needs to be turned on. Additionally, the app being used to manage the remote connection should have been allowed access to use location.

To allow apps on this device to use the location of another device

On the device making the connection:

1. Go to **Start** > **Settings** > **Privacy & security** > **Location**.
2. Make sure the **Location services** setting has been turned **On**.
3. Make sure the app used for remote connections has been granted access to your location.

On the device being connected to:

1. Go to **Start** > **Settings** > **Privacy & security** > **Location**.

2. Make sure the **Location services** setting has been turned **On**.
3. Turn the **Allow location override** setting **On**.

Location for websites in Microsoft Edge

When location is turned on for Microsoft Edge, you still have control over which websites can access your device location. Microsoft Edge will ask for your permission the first time you visit a website that requests your location information. You can turn off location permission for a website in Microsoft Edge settings. Learn more about location and privacy in Microsoft Edge

How we build the location services database

If Location services in turned on and your device has GPS capability, Microsoft will record the location of mobile cell towers and Wi-Fi access points to help us provide location services,. Our database might include the MAC addresses of your wireless router or other neighboring Wi-Fi network devices. We don’t associate MAC addresses with you personally or with the devices connected to your network.

To prevent Microsoft from using the MAC addresses of your Wi-Fi access points in our location services database, go to Opt out of location services.

How we help keep you informed: the location icon

When one or more apps are currently using your device location through the Windows location service, you’ll see the location icon in the notification area of your taskbar. Hover over the icon to see the name of the app or apps using location.

You can also see which apps are currently using your precise location or have recently accessed your precise location on your Windows device by going to **Start** > **Settings** > **Privacy & security** > **Location** and under **Let apps access your location** you'll see the date and time when location was last used.