

Alabama internet providers offer free service to students' homes after coronavirus epidemic

Some of the state's cable providers are rolling out free broadband services and upgrades starting Monday as Alabama's public schools prepare to close for at least two weeks and colleges convert to online instruction during the Coronavirus outbreak. Charter Spectrum, the state's largest provider, will offer free broadband and WiFi to households with K-12 or college students who don't already have a broadband subscription at any service level up to 100 Mbps. They're waving installation fees. You can call 1-844-488-8395 to enroll. It's also opening its WiFi hotspots across its Alabama service areas for public use. Comcast is pausing all data plans for 60 days and giving all customers unlimited data, and it's promising not to disconnect service or assess a late fee if someone contacts the company to let them know they can't pay their bills over that time. It's also offering free service through its WiFi hotspots across Alabama. East Alabama provider Beam is offering free 50 Mbps service for 30 days to new customers with K-12 or college students, along with free installation. You can call Beam for more details.

Alabama provider AT&T previously announced that it planned to waive internet overage fees, waive late fees and suspend termination of service during the pandemic. It's asking people who have trouble paying to call 1-800-288-2020. Alabama Superintendent of Education Eric Mackey announced late Friday that the state's pre-kindergarten and K-12 public schools would shut down after Wednesday, March 18, and tentatively plan to reopen April 6. Many non-public schools quickly followed suit, even as area colleges and universities announced a move to online instruction over the coming weeks. The broadband offers were announced late Saturday by the Alabama Cable and Broadband Association, an industry group. The group said in a statement that providers are working with local governments and nonprofit groups to tell people about the offers. Alabama's broadband access ranks 39th in the nation, according to aggregation site [highspeedinternet.com](https://www.highspeedinternet.com). An average of about 73% of Alabama homes had a broadband internet subscription from 2014 to 2018, according to federal estimates. CenturyLink and Google Fiber are among the providers that have signed an FCC pledge to waive late fees and terminations for people affected by the pandemic.