Windows 10 April 2020 update: Everything you need to know

Windows 10 2004 (that's the version number) will take only minutes to install and includes useful new features. Here's how to get it early.

The Windows 10 April 2020 Update is expected to roll out in the spring.

SOPA Images

Microsoft expects to release the Windows 10 April 2020 Update this spring, bringing new features to help with productivity and security. The update -- also known as Windows 10 versions 2004 and 20H1 -- follows Microsoft's usual update schedule but will bring more big changes than we've seen in other updates in recent years.

Windows 10 is now on more than 900 million devices, Microsoft said in September. Now that support for Windows 7 is officially over, Microsoft is encouraging users to either upgrade their PC to Windows 10 to keep it running smoothly and securely or buy a new computer. Major refreshes to the OS come about every six months, with the most recent being the November 2019 update. Early reports from our sister site ZDNet are that the update -- currently available as a preview release -- takes anywhere from 7 to 17 minutes to install.

Here's what we know so far.

When will the Windows 10 April 2020 Update be available?

For those in the Windows Insider Program, the April 2020 Update has been available as a preview release for about a year. If the update follows Microsoft's typical schedule, the final version should be generally available in early May.

If you want access to the preview release now, you can join the Windows 10 Insider Slow Ring, and toggle the Stop Getting Preview Builds option to On. (This allows you to use the current preview and keeps it from being replaced by future ones as they arrive.) Otherwise, you can wait until the update's general release.

What new features will version 20H1 include?

Windows 10 version 2004 includes a number of changes for users, according to Microsoft, such as:

Cortana: Microsoft says Cortana is evolving into a "personal productivity assistant" that can help you use Microsoft 365 apps. Cortana will be undocked from the taskbar, so you can move or resize it like any other app. An improved email feature lets you use Cortana to create emails (for example, you can say, "Send an email to Mary letting her know I'm running late" or "Show me emails from Jeff"). An improved calendar lets you do the same to create and ask about meetings. And Windows lets you use the assistant to open apps and adjust settings like brightness.

Search Home: Access four quick searches to your Search Home for easier access: weather, top news, today in history and new movies.

Kaomoji: Microsoft adds kaomoji -- like ¯_(ツ)_/¯ -- to its keyboard shortcut along with other emoji.

Virtual desktops: Rename your virtual desktops, instead of getting stuck with the system-issued names like Desktop 1.

Automatically open apps: Opt in to a setting to automatically open Universal Windows Platform apps after you restart your machine.

Will previous versions of Windows 10 still work?

Microsoft will end support for Windows 10 1809 (also known as the October 2018 update) Home, Pro, Pro Education and Pro for Workstations editions in May of this year. Enterprise and Education editions support will last until May 2021.

You can still use version 1809, but the loss of Microsoft support means you will no longer get important security patches or other updates.

Do I have to update to version 20H1?

Nope. Microsoft recommends that you update, of course, but it's not mandatory -- unless you're about to hit an end-of-service date for the version you're currently running. You can find out more about the update process on our sister site ZDNet.

To see which version of Windows 10 you have, go to Settings > System > About and scroll to Windows Specifications, where you'll find the edition and version number.

If you have version 1903 (released in May 2019) and want to keep it, you have until December 2020 before support ends. And if you have version 1909 (released in November 2019), you have until May 2021 to update.

For more, check out Windows 10 tips and tricks.