

## **FAQs for Emergency Alerts**

### **Questions prior to launch**

#### **1. What are Emergency Alerts and how will you receive one?**

Emergency Alerts are a public information system that we have developed to alert citizens to emergencies, both nationwide and in their local area, that represent a severe threat to life. The technology used allows a message to be broadcast to a defined area, meaning any compatible device in or entering that area will immediately receive the message, detailing the emergency and actions people need to take to ensure their safety. Compatible devices are iPhones made after 2015 with the latest software, and Android phones and tablets that are made after 2015 and have the latest software. All devices need to be 4G or 5G compatible. Phones purchased new since summer 2021 will automatically have the software activated within them.

Their purpose is to help save lives in emergency situations by issuing a warning and clear instructions about how best to respond. While the alert service will initially be used as part of our severe weather and flood warning response capabilities, it could also serve a wider purpose and be used as an emergency response for other scenarios, such as public health emergencies, fires, extreme weather and major incidents. Emergency Alerts are our way of warning people when lives are in danger.

Alerts are broadcasted via mobile phone cell towers to specific geographical areas. You do not need to modify location settings on your phone to receive them, and switching off location settings will not affect your ability to receive them.

#### **2. What do the messages look like and sound like?**

Emergency Alerts appear on your device's home screen. You have to acknowledge them before you can use your phone's other features. They appear as a notification and may include telephone numbers or website links containing further information. A loud, siren-like sound and vibration will accompany the message to raise awareness of the hazard or threat.

#### **3. What should I do when I receive an Emergency Alert?**

Read the content carefully. An Emergency Alert is likely to include a link to [gov.uk/alerts](https://www.gov.uk/alerts) where further information is contained, and/or a helpline. Alerts are sent to warn you when lives are in danger, and potentially, in some cases, for test purposes. Take the appropriate action as directed and consider alerting others in the area who may not have received or seen the message.

#### **4. What should I do if I receive a message while driving?**

You **MUST NOT** hold a mobile phone while driving or riding a motorcycle. It is illegal to do so. You must have hands-free access such as voice command, a dashboard holder or mat, or a windscreen mount and the device must not block the driver's view of the road or the traffic. You should not read or otherwise respond to an emergency alert whilst driving or

riding a motorcycle. For more information on the latest legislation around driving and using a mobile phone, follow this link for more advice: <https://www.gov.uk/using-mobile-phones-when-driving-the-law>.

Please be aware, the alert will appear on your device until acknowledged and you will hear a loud siren-like sound for up to 10 seconds. If you are driving, you should continue to drive and not respond to the noise or attempt to pick up the mobile phone and deal with the message. Instead, find somewhere safe and legal to stop before reading the message. If there is nowhere safe or legal to stop close by, and nobody else is in the vehicle to read the alert, tune into live radio and wait for bulletins until you can find somewhere safe and legal to stop.

You must stay in full control of your vehicle at all times. The police can stop you if they think you are not in control because you are distracted and you can be prosecuted. The law still applies if you are stopped at traffic lights, queuing in traffic or supervising a learner driver. You can, however, use a hand-held mobile phone if either you are safely parked or need to call 999 or 112 in an emergency and it is unsafe or impractical to stop.

#### **5. Is my privacy and security protected?**

Yes. Emergency Alerts require no personal information (such as telephone number, identity or location). The technology used allows a message to be broadcast to a defined area, meaning any compatible device in or entering that area immediately receives the message. Emergency Alerts are therefore one-way and do not provide any feedback on the recipients' location or whether they have received an alert. The recipients' telephone numbers and specific locations are not required, known or used, and no personal information on recipients of Emergency Alerts is shared by the Mobile Network Operators and no personal information is gathered by the government or the Mobile Network Operators.

#### **6. Will alerts sent to my mobile phone tell authorities where I am or be used to gather data about me?**

No. Emergency Alerts are one-way and do not provide any feedback on your location or whether you have received an Emergency Alert. No data is being gathered about you, your phone or your location. No personal information is gathered by the government or the Mobile Network Operators on recipients of Emergency Alerts.

#### **7. Will all the Mobile Networks provide Emergency Alerts?**

Yes. Emergency Alerts will be sent across all mobile networks, including the mobile virtual networks (e.g. Asda, Lebara, GiffGaff) which have previously been left out of nationwide-SMS messages.

#### **8. Do I need to download an app?**

No. Emergency Alerts do not require an App to be downloaded. However, depending on your device you may need to download the latest software to ensure your device can receive the Alerts.

## **9. Is it used elsewhere?**

Yes. Similar capabilities have been adopted by many countries internationally as an alerting capability. These countries include the United States, Netherlands, Canada, South Korea and Japan.

The UK Government conducted a trial of emergency alerts in Reading in June 2021. The trial was a success. Almost 90% of those receiving the alert expressed a desire to receive similar alerts in the future.

## **10. Will Emergency Alerts be available in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland?**

Although telecoms and national security matters are generally reserved, many aspects of civil emergency management and resilience are devolved. That is why the system has been developed through partnership working with Devolved Administrations. The UK Government has committed that all parts of the United Kingdom should have access to the system, and that the system should be usable in a way consistent with responsibilities as set out in the devolution settlements.

## **11. Is there a charge to receive an Emergency Alert?**

No. There are no charges to receive Emergency Alerts. Alerts are sent on a specific channel that is separate from normal text and data traffic. While the alerts may look like text messages, they are not and will not be charged to your bill like text messages. Additionally if you use Pay-As-You-Go and find yourself out of credit, you will still receive alerts.

## **12. Will this new service affect my battery life?**

No. Neither Emergency Alerts nor leaving the ability to receive them on in your phone settings will impact your phone's battery life. Most people will receive them infrequently - beyond the UK Test Message it would be rare for anyone to receive more than one per year.

## **13. Can I reply to an Emergency Alert?**

No. The messages are one-way only. Check the contents of the message for URLs to further information on GOV.UK or contact numbers.

## **14. What languages will messages be broadcast in?**

The primary language will be English. Wherever practicable, alerts impacting Wales will be sent in both English and Welsh.

## **15. How many people will it reach?**

We want to make sure these alerts reach as many of the target population as possible. Anyone with a compatible device in the targeted region will receive the alerts. Our research estimates that nearly 90% of mobile handsets will receive the Emergency Alert sent out for the UK Test Message.

## **16. What if my phone can't receive Emergency Alerts?**

Emergency Alerts are just one of many tools the Government has to communicate with the public about emergency situations. The service will be one source of information in the event of a life-threatening emergency. Existing procedures will still be in place, so those without a mobile will still be made aware through the news and local emergency services, for example.

As part of the public information campaign, we are working closely with community leaders and stakeholders to ensure that those communities and people who are less likely to have a 4G/5G capable device will be able to access the information distributed through the alerts. We advise anyone who does not have a 4G/5G capable device to identify someone who lives near them who will be able to inform them of any Emergency Alerts being sent.

## **17. Does it matter what network my phone is on?**

No. Emergency Alerts will be sent across all networks, as well as subsidiary 'Mobile Virtual Network Operators' such as Lebara, Giff Gaff and Tesco Mobile.

## **18. Are you using all the network types, like 2G, 3G, 4G and 5G?**

Alerts will be received by devices that use 4G and 5G network (with the exception of tablets). Our research indicates that nearly 90% of mobile handsets will be able to receive the alerts. We recognise that leaves some phones unable to receive them, however with the planned switch-off of 2G and 3G, we expect this percentage to rise as customers switch to newer handsets.

## **19. What sort of Emergency Alert might I receive?**

During the initial pilot phase, alerts will be limited to severe weather events and flooding. Future messages are expected to include these as well as fires, public health emergencies and other life-threatening or major incidents.

## **20. How frequently might I get them?**

The likelihood of receiving a message in any given year is low. The most frequent use is expected to be for flooding, but frequency depends on your personal proximity to threats.

## **21. Can I opt out?**

Members of the public can opt out of receiving all Emergency Alerts (including the UK-wide national test message) - to do so search for Emergency Alerts in your phone's settings. It is not possible to opt out of alerts by type of hazard, for example only receiving messages about flooding but not for industrial accidents.

We strongly recommend that people do not opt out of the service, as it is intended to warn you when lives are in danger. It is possible to opt-out but we would encourage you not to. More information is available at <https://www.gov.uk/alerts/how-alerts-work>.

**22. If I'm on a call or using my phone, like watching a video or using Facebook when an Emergency Alert is sent, will I receive it?**

Yes. You will receive the Emergency Alert no matter what you are using your phone for.

**23. Will I receive a message if I am using my phone as a sat-nav system?**

Yes. An Emergency Alert will display as a message if a user is using an App (e.g. maps for navigation).

**24. How will I know that the alert is genuine and not a scam to get me to do something (i.e. leave my house for my own 'personal safety')?**

An Emergency Alert looks and sounds very different to other types of messages such as SMS 'text messages'. You'll know if you get an Emergency Alert because you'll hear a loud, siren-like sound and your phone will use a distinct vibration. You have to acknowledge them before you can use your phone's other features. They appear as a notification and may include a phone number or a link to [gov.uk/alerts](https://www.gov.uk/alerts), where you'll also be able to check that an alert is genuine.

If you receive an alert but are still in doubt about the origins of the message, go to [gov.uk/alerts](https://www.gov.uk/alerts) or contact neighbours, friends or family in the nearby area to check whether they have received it too.

You can validate that an alert is real by going to [gov.uk/alerts](https://www.gov.uk/alerts) - legitimate alerts will always be uploaded here so you can check whenever you receive one.

If you believe you have received a scam SMS text, report it by forwarding it to 7726. Do not click on any links in the SMS text message. You will not be able to forward a genuine Emergency Alert message.

If you or someone you know has been the victim of fraud or cybercrime you can report it to Action Fraud at [www.actionfraud.police.uk](https://www.actionfraud.police.uk) or by phoning 0300 123 2040. In Scotland, you can report it by dialling 101.

**25. What time will Emergency Alerts arrive?**

Where possible, messages will be sent out during normal waking hours. However there may be situations where messages need to be sent overnight (for example for severe flooding) where it is vital to inform you as soon as possible. A public test of the system will never be carried out overnight.

**26. What happens if my device is in airplane/flight mode, turned off or out of battery?**

In this case you will not receive an alert. However, once your phone has power, is switched on and connected to the network, it will receive the Emergency Alert assuming it is being broadcast at that time and the threat has not passed.

## **27. Will my 4G/5G enabled tablet receive the messages?**

For hand-held tablets, iPads cannot currently receive alerts unless connected to an iPhone. 4G/5G-enabled tablets that support a SIM can receive alerts. Some Apple Watches may receive alerts depending on whether they are attached to a phone or not.

### **Content applicable after the service is live**

## **28. Where has my Emergency Alert gone?**

If you received an Emergency Alert, you may still be able to view it on your phone after you have acknowledged it. On Android phones, the alert may be found in the Messages app or 'Emergency Alert History'. For iPhone users, the alert will be in your notifications. Access your notifications by swiping down from the top of your screen. If you delete your notifications, the alert will also be deleted.

## **29. What should I do if I keep getting the same Alert?**

You may receive the same Alert multiple times if you have an Android device that's set to remind you about alerts. Check your phone's settings to turn this off. You may also want to check that you have the latest version of your phone's software installed. If you live near the English/Welsh border, it is possible that you will receive an alert in English and a separate alert in English and Welsh.

## **30. What other ways will you use to alert people of an emergency?**

Emergency Alerts are just one of many tools the government has to communicate with the public about emergency situations, e.g. through the media, community organisations and local emergency services.

Each region across the country also has a Local Resilience Forum in place, made up of local authorities, the emergency services, the NHS & health bodies and environment-related government agencies, set up to warn, inform and advise the public in the event of an emergency. Local Resilience Forums work with partners in a local area to alert people of an emergency.

## **31. What act/regulations give the Government the power to do this?**

The Civil Contingencies Act (CCA) Part 1 places duties on Category 1 and 2 emergency responders to work together to have arrangements for means of communicating with members of the public to warn them of emergencies and provide them with advice and information.

In the Privacy and Electronic Communications (EC Directive) Regulations 2003 (PECR), the government took powers for the purpose of enabling the testing and operation of an emergency alerting system. The powers allow ministers, the police and certain other persons to direct Mobile Network Operators to send an Emergency Alert either for the purposes of testing an Emergency Alert system or for operating such a system in an emergency. The

powers also exempt Mobile Network Operators from certain data processing restrictions when they are operating such a service.