



Mobile Network Closure Guidance

Developed by TSA

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What's happening?

3G retirement / sunset planning

Since its launch in 2003, 3G was the first higher speed mobile internet access and kick-started the mobile internet revolution. Over the last 20 years since its launch, technology continues to move at pace, and the “high speeds” 3G delivered in 2003 are now considered slow compared to 4G, and the advent of 5G.

When is it happening?

Now.

Vodafone has started to decommission sites, region by region, and is aiming to complete in early 2024. At the same time Vodafone will be largely reusing the band, currently used for 3G, to broadcast 4G, improving speeds in those few locations where 3G is still the best available technology.

The other UK Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) are following a similar path although timescales for switch off are due to start in 2024. At this current time, we are aware of the following:

- EE – Switch off through 2024
- Three – Switch off through 2024
- O2 – Switch off through 2025

This means some networks will continue to run the service beyond 2023, with 3G still being available, but it will be in constant and steady decline until around the middle to end of 2025 from which point it is likely that no 3G coverage will be available.

Unfortunately, MNO's have not published switch off dates by region although this information will be shared once and if it becomes available.

What does this mean for me?

If you have devices capable of 4G, your service should improve, as now 4G will cover most of the areas that were previously only covered by 3G. Operators are expected to ensure that they offer a broadly equivalent level of 4G coverage ahead of 3G, and subsequently 2G, switch-off. Because Telecare devices have a requirement for voice, 4G devices will require combined attachment to 2G or 3G as well as 4G until VoLTE is available on the SIM cards.

4G VoLTE (Voice using 4G) is not yet available on roaming networks. This is due to be available throughout early to middle of 2024. During this time, voice enabled services will use 2G or 3G based services.

If you have devices capable of 2G and 3G, this device should fall back to 2G when it can no longer see a 3G service. It is advised that you speak with your manufacturer to confirm 2G availability switches seamlessly without any further intervention or firmware upgrades.

If you have 3G only device, including those using a roaming SIM not provided by a UK mobile operator, you need to plan your strategy for removing these devices from service over time. TSA, Mobius and CSL are working to provide information to help service providers identify their customers who may be affected, with support from the mobile operators and Ofcom. Depending on the network, a 3G only device will lose the ability to connect via mobile networks at some point between now and potentially 2025.

What should I do if I'm unsure?

If you are unsure, speak to your hardware manufacturer about the product you have, the technologies it uses as well as fall-back capabilities, and the latest products and roadmap as part of your planning. The TSA, Mobius and CSL are also happy to support you where we can.

Suggested Questions to ask Suppliers

1. Does my device use 3G?
2. Does my device have other technologies (e.g. 2G, 4G, Broadband) available when 3G is switched off?
 - a. If yes, has fall-back been tested on data and voice?
3. What MNOs (EE, Three, Vodafone, O2) are available to my device on which different technologies (2G/4G)?

What happens when 4G ends?

4G was launched 10 years after 3G, around 2012. This means it is a much more recent technology and is therefore only halfway through its lifespan as a worst case. It is likely 4G would be in service for at least 10 years or more if you take 3G's lifespan as a worst-case guide.

Should I deploy 5G?

5G is still in launch phase across the UK, the hardware is still largely more expensive, and there would be no perceived benefit to Telecare devices from using it.

Given the likely lifespan of 4G, this is the most appropriate technology for the use case and device longevity.

What happens when 2G ends?

Telecare devices that use 2G and 3G networks may be able to fall back onto the 2G network once 3G is switched off and continue to operate on that basis. However, the government and industry have also announced their intention to sunset the 2G network. The 2G network is expected to continue to operate for a further 5 to 10 years, between 2028 and 2033 at the latest. No UK operator has yet announced plans for the switch off of their 2G network. If you have a device that currently uses 2G, or will use 2G following the 3G switch off, you will need to develop a migration plan with this timeframe in mind.

UK MNO coverage checkers and switch off plans

- . **EE:** [coverage checker](#) and [3G switch off plans](#) 'early 2024'
- . **Three:** [coverage checker](#) and [3G switch off plans](#) 'end of 2024'
- . **Vodafone:** [coverage checker](#) and [3G switch off plans](#)
- . **O2:** [coverage checker](#) : [3G switch off plans](#)

Ofcom information

- . [3G not spot data](#)
- . [Ofcom mobile coverage postcode tracker](#)
- . [Connected Nations \(contains information on 2G/3G/4G/5G network coverage\)](#)
- . [Ofcom Consumer guide on 3G switch off](#)
- . [Ofcom 3g and 2g switch off: Our expectations of mobile providers](#)

Other useful links

- . [Joint UK Government and industry statement on the sunsetting of 2G and 3G networks](#)
- . [which? UK 3G switch off - what you need to know](#)
- . [ISPreview 3G 'mythbusters'](#)

Glossary of Terms

Combined Attachment	<i>This is where a device connects to 4G and either 2G or 3G at the same time. Some 4G Telecare devices may require this to use voice services until VoLTE is available.</i>
Fall-back	<i>This is where a device uses another technology once 3G is no longer available</i>
MNO	<i>Mobile Network Operator.</i>
Not spot	<i>An area that no longer has coverage once an MNO has switched off 3G.</i>
Technologies	<i>2G, 3G, or 4G</i>
VoLTE	<i>Voice using 4G or 5G technology.</i>