

Which Carrier Works at Your Address?

START HERE

- 1 Open a web browser and go to broadbandmap.fcc.gov. On a phone, type it into the address bar at the top, not the search box.
- 2 Type your full home address into the search box on the map and press enter. The map zooms to your exact spot.
- 3 Look for the option to show mobile coverage (as opposed to home internet). The map can show both; you want the mobile side.
- 4 Use the filter to view one carrier at a time — AT&T, Verizon, T-Mobile — and see which ones claim to cover your pin.

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How to Check Which Carrier Actually Works at Your Address

Free coverage maps, trial SIMs, and the neighbor test — how to check before you switch.

————— **An Extended Guide · No. 1692 · COVERAGE** —————

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1. Why Your Address Is the Only Test That Counts

The map on the website is not the signal in your bedroom.

Here is the hard truth that saves people the most grief: cell coverage is a block-by-block, sometimes room-by-room thing. The map on a carrier's website shows the whole county washed in one confident color, as if the signal were the same everywhere. It is not. A hill, a stand of trees, how far you sit from the nearest tower, the metal in your roof — all of it pushes the signal around. Two houses a mile apart can have completely opposite results.

I have stood in a kitchen here in Portage County where one carrier showed five strong bars and another showed a single flickering bar — same room, same minute. And I have seen the reverse two miles down the road. So a friend raving about their carrier across town, or a map promising full coverage, tells you very little about what will happen in your own back bedroom. The only test that truly counts is the signal inside the walls where you actually live.

The good news: you can find this out for free, before you spend a dollar or sign anything. This guide walks through four ways, from the quickest rough check to the one test that cannot lie — putting a trial SIM in a phone and walking your own house. Do even two of these and you will switch carriers with confidence instead of crossing your fingers.

GOOD TO KNOW

Every budget brand rides on one of three real networks — AT&T, Verizon, or T-Mobile. So checking coverage really means checking those three networks. Match the result to a brand afterward.

2. The Four Ways, At a Glance

Quickest to most certain.

There are four practical ways to find out which network covers your home. Each is more work and more certain than the last. You do not have to do all four — pick the ones that fit your comfort and your patience.

- Ask the neighbors. Two minutes, surprisingly reliable, costs nothing. Whose phone works well right around you?
- Check the free maps. The government coverage map and each carrier's own map. A good starting picture, with real limits you should understand.

- Test with a trial SIM. The gold standard. A short free trial lets you run a network inside your own house for a few days before switching anything.
- Walk the house watching the bars. Do this with any test phone, room by room, to find the weak spots before they surprise you.

If I had to pick just one for you, it would be the trial SIM, because it is the only test done with a real phone, on real towers, standing in your real kitchen. Everything else is an estimate. But the neighbor test is a wonderful free first filter — if three neighbors all swear by the same carrier, you have probably found your network before you have even opened a map.

GOOD TO KNOW

Do the neighbor test first to narrow it down, then confirm the winner with a trial SIM. That combination is fast, free, and about as sure as it gets.

3. The Free Government Coverage Map

broadbandmap.fcc.gov — honest, because carriers cannot fudge it.

The federal government runs a coverage map at broadbandmap.fcc.gov. It is worth knowing because the carriers have to report their coverage to it under rules, and you can compare all of them in one place instead of bouncing between company websites that each paint themselves in the best light.

- 1 Open a web browser and go to broadbandmap.fcc.gov. On a phone, type it into the address bar at the top, not the search box.
- 2 Type your full home address into the search box on the map and press enter. The map zooms to your exact spot.
- 3 Look for the option to show mobile coverage (as opposed to home internet). The map can show both; you want the mobile side.
- 4 Use the filter to view one carrier at a time — AT&T, Verizon, T-Mobile — and see which ones claim to cover your pin.

What you are looking for is simple: which of the three big networks say they reach your address, and how strong they claim it is. If a network shows no coverage at your pin, that is a strong signal to cross it off. If it claims good coverage, treat that as a hopeful maybe, not a promise — and confirm it with one of the real-world tests later in this guide.

GOOD TO KNOW

The map is updated on a schedule, roughly every few months, so brand-new towers may not show yet. It is a starting picture, not the final word.

4. Reading the Map — and Its Honest Limits

Why a green dot does not always mean good bars.

The government map is useful, but you should know what it does and does not promise, so you are not fooled by a cheerful color. The biggest thing to understand: the bar the map uses for calling an area covered is a low one. A spot can count as covered even if the signal there is only strong enough for fairly basic speeds. So covered on the map can still mean weak in real life.

Second, the data is reported by the carriers themselves and refreshed only on a schedule. That means it can lag behind reality by months, and it leans optimistic — companies are describing their own coverage. Think of the map as the carriers' best case, not a measurement taken on your porch.

Third, the map paints broad areas. It cannot know that your house sits in a dip behind a hill, or that your bedroom is on the far side of the building from the tower. Those local details are exactly what decide whether the phone works where you sit — and they are exactly what the map cannot see.

So use the map to rule networks out and to build a shortlist, not to make the final call. If a network shows nothing at your address, believe it and move on. If it shows coverage, promote it to your test list. The real verdict comes from a phone in your hand, in your house, which is the next few chapters.

WATCH OUT

Do not switch carriers on the strength of a map alone. I have watched a map promise full coverage at a house where the real signal died at the back door. Maps start the search; they do not end it.

5. Each Carrier's Own Coverage Map

Useful, but read with a grain of salt.

Every carrier also posts its own coverage map on its website — AT&T, Verizon, and T-Mobile all have one, and the budget brands usually point to the map of whichever network they ride on. These can be a touch more up to date than the government map, and they often separate regular coverage from their faster 5G coverage.

To use one, go to the carrier's website, find the coverage or network map (often under a heading like coverage or why us), and type in your address. You will usually see shaded areas: one shade for strong coverage, lighter shades for weaker or edge coverage, and blank for none. Pay attention to those lighter shades — edge coverage often means a bar or two that comes and goes, which is frustrating for calls.

The grain of salt: these are marketing maps. The company wants you to sign up, so the coloring tends to be generous. They are most honest when they admit a gap — if a carrier's own map shows weak or no coverage at your address, believe it completely, because they had every reason to show it better. When they show strong coverage, treat it as encouraging but still worth confirming with a real phone.

TIP

Compare the carrier's own map against the government map for the same address. Where both agree, you can trust it more. Where they disagree, the real-world test settles it.

6. The Neighbor Test

The fastest free check there is.

The quickest, cheapest, and surprisingly reliable check costs nothing and takes a short conversation: ask the people who live right around you whose phone works well inside their house. Because coverage is so local, your immediate neighbors are the closest thing to a test of your own address without touching a phone.

Ask it specifically. Not just what carrier do you have, but does your phone work well inside — in the kitchen, the back bedroom, the basement? A neighbor who gets full bars on their front porch but drops calls in their family room is telling you something important. The rooms that matter are the ones where you both actually spend time, not the driveway.

Try to ask a few neighbors, not just one, and favor the ones closest to you and in similar houses. If three nearby neighbors all say the same carrier is solid indoors, you have very likely found your network, and you can go straight to confirming it with a trial. If they are split, that tells you the area is marginal and you will want to lean harder on a real-world test before committing.

GOOD TO KNOW

Remember budget brands share towers. A neighbor on full-price Verizon and you on Visible will see the same coverage, because it is the same network. So their experience transfers directly to the budget brand on that network.

7. Trial SIMs — Test Inside Your Own Walls

The one test that cannot lie.

This is the gold standard, and the best part is it costs nothing and changes nothing about your current service. Several budget brands offer a free or near-free trial that runs on your existing phone using an eSIM — a digital SIM — alongside your normal service. You keep your current number working while you quietly test a second network in the background. If it is no good, you delete it and you are exactly where you started.

How it works in plain terms: the brand sends you a code to scan, your phone adds a second line, and for a set number of days you can switch over to that network and see how it really performs in your house. Visible, which is on Verizon, and US Mobile, which lets you pick Verizon or T-Mobile, both offer trials like this. That lets you test the actual towers from your actual kitchen before you move your number or spend a cent.

- 1 Sign up for the trial on the brand's app or website and choose the eSIM option.
- 2 Scan the code they send. Your phone adds the trial line alongside your current one.
- 3 In your phone settings, switch to the trial line for a few days of normal use.
- 4 Walk your house and your routine — make calls, load a map, check email — in every room that matters.
- 5 If it works, keep it and port your number over later. If not, remove the trial line and move on. No harm done.

WATCH OUT

Not every phone supports eSIM, and the very oldest do not. If your phone cannot do eSIM, a neighbor with a phone on the network you are testing can stand in your rooms and check the bars for you instead.

8. Walking the House With the Bars

Find the weak rooms before they surprise you.

Whether you are testing with a trial SIM or borrowing a phone on a network you are considering, the actual test is simple: walk your whole house, slowly, watching the signal bars and trying a real call in each room. The goal is to find the weak spots on purpose, now, instead of discovering them during an important call next month.

- 1 Start in the room where you spend the most time — often the kitchen or a favorite chair. Make a short call and listen for clear, steady sound.
- 2 Move to each bedroom, especially the one farthest from the road, where towers usually are. Watch whether the bars drop.
- 3 Check the basement if you use it. Signal often fades underground; this is where many rural homes lose a carrier.
- 4 Step out to the garage or any metal-roofed building. Note how much the signal falls.
- 5 Finish on the porch or in the yard. If signal is strong outside but weak inside, that is a classic building-materials problem, and it is fixable.

Give each room a few seconds — bars can take a moment to catch up as you move. What you want is not perfect bars everywhere, but solid signal in the rooms you use most and no dead calls where it matters. A weak basement is livable; a weak favorite chair is not.

GOOD TO KNOW

Bars are a rough gauge, not a precise reading. A single steady bar that holds a clear call is better than three jumpy bars that drop you. Judge by whether the call stays clear, not just the picture.

9. What the Bars Actually Mean

And a more honest number hiding in your phone.

The signal bars at the top of your screen are a friendly summary, not a careful measurement. Different phones draw the bars differently, so four bars on one phone may be the same real signal as two bars on another. That is fine for a rough sense, but it is why two people can argue about coverage while standing in the same room.

What matters more than the picture is how the phone behaves. Does a call connect quickly and stay clear? Does a web page or the weather load without a long spinning wheel? Do

texts send right away? If yes, the signal is good enough, however many bars show. If calls break up or pages hang, the signal is marginal even if the bars look healthy.

There is a more honest number tucked inside the phone for the curious, shown as a negative figure like minus ninety or minus one-ten. A smaller number after the minus sign (closer to zero, like minus eighty) means a stronger signal; a bigger one (like minus one-twenty) means weaker. You do not need to chase this — it lives in deep settings menus — but if someone mentions it, that is all it means. For almost everyone, the plain test is enough: make a call in each room and listen.

WATCH OUT

The best single test is a two-minute phone call to a friend from your favorite chair. If they hear you clearly and the call never drops, that network works where you need it.

10. Rural Portage County Realities

Hills, distance, and why coverage gets patchy out here.

A lot of the folks I help live outside the bigger towns — out past the edges of Ravenna, Kent, and Streetsboro, down the township roads, on properties with some land. Coverage out here behaves differently than it does in a dense neighborhood, and it is worth understanding why so you are not surprised.

The main reason is distance and terrain. Cell towers are spaced farther apart in rural areas, so your phone may be reaching for a tower miles away. Add a rolling hill between you and that tower, or a thick stand of trees, and the signal weakens before it ever reaches your house. This is why one carrier can be strong on one road and weak on the next — it comes down to which tower each spot can see.

It is also why the neighbor test is so valuable out here: your nearest neighbor is reaching for the same tower you are, through roughly the same hills and trees. And it is why the carriers genuinely differ by location more than they do in town. One company may have a tower just over the rise from you while another's nearest tower is on the far side of a valley. There is no national best carrier for rural Portage County — only the best one for your particular spot.

GOOD TO KNOW

If every network is marginal at your house, do not despair — Wi-Fi calling over your home internet and, in some cases, a signal booster can rescue a weak spot. Both are covered in the next chapters.

11. Barns, Basements, and Metal Roofs

When the signal is fine outside but dies indoors.

A very common pattern out here: the signal is perfectly good in the yard, but the phone struggles the moment you step inside. That is almost never the carrier's fault — it is the building swallowing the signal. Knowing this saves you from switching carriers to fix a problem a new carrier would not fix either.

The worst offenders are metal and earth. A pole barn or a shop with a steel roof and steel siding acts like a shield — cell signal has a hard time getting through all that metal. The same goes for a basement: you are surrounded by earth and concrete, and the signal fades the farther down you go. Even a regular house with foil-backed insulation or energy-efficient coated windows can knock the signal down noticeably indoors.

The tell is simple. If you have strong bars on the porch and weak bars in the back room or the barn, the carrier is reaching your property fine — the building is the problem. Switching carriers rarely helps in that case, because the new one has to get through the same walls. What helps is routing your calls over your home internet instead (Wi-Fi calling) or, for a barn or shop, a signal booster that catches the outdoor signal and rebroadcasts it inside.

WATCH OUT

Do not pay to switch carriers hoping to fix a metal-building dead zone. Test the new network in that same building first — odds are it struggles too, and the real fix is Wi-Fi calling or a booster.

12. Wi-Fi Calling as a Coverage Fix

Turn weak cell signal into a clear call over your internet.

If your home internet is decent but your cell signal indoors is weak, Wi-Fi calling may be the simplest fix there is — and it is usually free and built right into your phone. It lets your phone make and receive regular calls and texts over your home Wi-Fi instead of the cell tower. To the person on the other end, nothing is different; they just hear you clearly.

Most modern phones and all three big networks support it. On an iPhone you turn it on under Settings, then Phone, then Wi-Fi Calling. On many Android phones it is under Settings, then the connections or network area, then Wi-Fi Calling — the exact wording varies a little by brand. Flip it on, agree to the prompt, and from then on your phone quietly uses Wi-Fi for calls whenever the cell signal is weak and good Wi-Fi is available.

There is one small but important safety step. When you set up Wi-Fi calling, the phone usually asks for your home address. Fill it in accurately. The reason is 911: a call over Wi-Fi does not automatically tell the dispatcher where you are the way a cell call does, so the address you register is what they will see if you ever call for help from home. It takes a moment and it matters.

TIP

For a rural house with spotty cell signal but a working internet line, Wi-Fi calling can matter more than which carrier you pick. A clear call over Wi-Fi beats one jumpy bar every time.

13. Signal Boosters — When They Earn Their Keep

For the house or barn where even the best network is weak.

Sometimes you have tested every network and they are all weak indoors, and your internet is too poor for Wi-Fi calling to help. That is the situation a signal booster is made for. A booster catches whatever cell signal exists outside — usually with a small antenna mounted up high or outdoors — amplifies it, and rebroadcasts it inside the building. It cannot create signal from nothing, but it can take a faint outdoor signal and make it usable indoors.

Boosters are most worth it for two situations out here: a house in a genuine fringe area where the nearest usable signal is outside on the hill, and a metal pole barn or shop where you want to be reachable while you work. In both, a booster can turn a dead zone into a workable one. They do cost money and they do need a bit of signal outside to grab onto, so they are not magic — but where they fit, they fit well.

A couple of honest cautions. A booster is tuned to help on the networks it supports, so you generally choose it for the carrier you are using. And placement matters a lot — the outside antenna needs to reach the best available signal, and the inside and outside antennas need separation to work right. This is a job where getting it set up correctly is most of the battle, and it is one of the things I am glad to handle on a visit.

GOOD TO KNOW

Try Wi-Fi calling first — it is free. Reach for a booster only when the networks are all weak and your internet cannot carry the calls. No sense paying for hardware you may not need.

14. Testing Before a Trip or a Second Home

The same checks work away from home.

Everything in this guide works just as well for a place other than your main house — a cabin, a lake place, a child's home you visit often, or a winter spot down south. If being reachable at that second location matters, it is worth running the same checks there before you assume your carrier works.

The neighbor test still shines: ask the folks around the cabin or the winter place whose phone works there. The free maps still give a starting picture — type that address in instead of home. And if you will spend real time there, a trial SIM on the network the locals favor is the surest way to know, since you can test it in that building on a visit.

One thing specific to travel and second homes: do not assume the carrier that is strong at your main house is strong hundreds of miles away. The networks each have their own patchwork of strong and weak regions across the country. A carrier that is wonderful in Portage County might be thin where your daughter lives, and the reverse. If you split your time between two places, test both, and pick the carrier — or the flexible brand that can switch networks — that handles both reasonably.

TIP

For folks who travel a lot or snowbird, a brand that lets you switch between networks, or one with strong nationwide reach, can be worth more than the lowest price. Match the plan to where you actually go.

15. Crowd-Sourced Maps Like CellMapper

Real measurements from real phones.

Beyond the official maps, there are community maps built from measurements taken by real people's phones as they move around. CellMapper is the best known. Instead of the carriers reporting their own coverage, these maps show where actual phones have found actual signal and where the towers really sit. That makes them a useful reality check against the polished official maps.

The way to use a map like this is to see where the nearest towers for each network actually are relative to your house, and whether other people have recorded usable signal near you. If you can see that your network of choice has a tower just over the next rise, that is reassuring. If the nearest recorded signal for a network is miles off with nothing closer, that fits a weak result.

The honest limit: these maps depend on volunteers driving and walking around with an app, so quiet rural areas may have thin data simply because fewer people have measured there. An empty patch on a crowd map does not prove there is no coverage — it may just mean nobody mapped it. So treat these as one more clue alongside the official maps and, above all, your own in-house test. No map beats a phone in your own kitchen.

GOOD TO KNOW

These community maps lean a little technical, with talk of towers and bands. You do not need to understand all of it — just whether a network has towers near you and whether people have found signal there.

16. Your One-Afternoon Test Plan

Put it all together in a couple of hours.

Here is how I would spend one calm afternoon settling the coverage question for good, using nothing but free tools. You do not need to do every chapter in this guide — this sequence hits the high points and gives you a confident answer.

- 1 Spend ten minutes on the neighbor test. Ask two or three nearby neighbors whose phone works well inside their homes. Note which carriers come up.
- 2 Spend ten minutes on the free maps. Check broadbandmap.fcc.gov and the own map of any carrier your neighbors named. Cross off any network that shows nothing at your address.

- 3 You should now have a shortlist of one or two networks. Sign up for a free trial SIM on the top one — Visible for Verizon, US Mobile for Verizon or T-Mobile — on your current phone.
- 4 Walk your whole house with the trial line active. Make a short call from your favorite chair, each bedroom, the basement, and any barn or shop. Note where it is clear and where it struggles.
- 5 If the rooms that matter are solid, you have found your network. If an important room is weak, try Wi-Fi calling there, or test the second network on your shortlist the same way. At the end of that afternoon you will know, for certain, which network works in the rooms where you live — not a map's guess, a real test. That is worth far more than any ad, and it means you can switch carriers knowing exactly what you are getting.

TIP

Write down your results room by room. Next time you shop, or if you add a line for a spouse, you will not have to figure it all out again.

17. When to Just Call Me

What I bring and what I test.

Some folks enjoy running these tests themselves, and this guide is written so you can. Others would rather hand it to someone who does it every week, especially if the phone settings feel fiddly or the house has a stubborn weak spot. Either is fine, and here is what I actually do on a coverage visit so you know what you would be getting.

- I bring test SIMs for the major networks and put them in a phone, so I can measure each network right in your rooms — no guessing from maps.
- I walk the whole house and any outbuildings with you, finding the strong and weak spots and writing them down.
- I check whether a weak indoor spot is the network or the building, so you do not switch carriers to fix something a new carrier would not fix.
- I set up Wi-Fi calling correctly, including your home address for 911, if that is the right fix.
- I tell you honestly whether a booster is worth it for your situation, and handle the fussy placement if it is.

The whole point is that you end up on the network that truly covers the rooms you live in, with the weak spots handled, instead of paying month after month for service that frustrates you. Coverage done right is quiet — the phone just works, everywhere you need it.

GOOD TO KNOW

If you are already planning to switch carriers, a coverage check first means you switch to the right one, once. That is cheaper than switching twice.

18. Traps People Fall Into

The coverage mistakes I see most.

A few mistakes come up over and over when people check coverage. Knowing them ahead of time saves a wasted switch and a frustrating month.

- Trusting the map and skipping the real test. Maps are optimistic and broad. They start the search; a phone in your house ends it.
- Testing only on the porch. Signal outdoors tells you little about your back bedroom. Test the rooms you actually use.
- Blaming the carrier for a building problem. If signal is strong outside and weak inside, the walls are the issue — switching carriers rarely fixes it.
- Asking a neighbor across town instead of next door. Coverage is local. The closer the neighbor, the better the clue.
- Assuming your home carrier works at the cabin or down south. Networks vary by region. Test the second place separately.

WATCH OUT

The costliest trap is switching on a hunch and discovering the dead spot after you have moved your number. A free trial SIM, used first, prevents exactly that.

19. Questions I Hear A Lot

Short, honest answers.

Q: The map says I have great coverage, but my calls drop at home. How?

A: Two common reasons. The map uses a low bar for calling an area covered, so covered can still be weak. And your building — metal roof, basement, coated windows — may be blocking a signal that is fine outdoors. Try Wi-Fi calling before you switch.

Q: Does a free trial SIM mess up my current phone or number?

A: No. It adds a second line in the background and leaves your current service and number untouched. If you do not like it, you remove it and nothing changed.

Q: My neighbor and I have the same carrier but different results. Why?

A: Small differences add up — which direction your houses face the tower, trees, a hill, building materials. Coverage really can differ house to house, which is why your own test matters most.

Q: Is there a carrier that just works everywhere out here?

A: No single one wins everywhere in rural Portage County. It depends on which tower your particular spot can see. That is exactly why we test at your address rather than trusting a reputation.

GOOD TO KNOW

If the honest answer is that every network is marginal at your house, the fix is usually Wi-Fi calling or a booster, not an endless hunt for a better carrier.

ON THE ROAD

20. Checking Coverage Along Your Commute

The roads you drive matter as much as the rooms you sit in.

Most of this guide is about the signal inside your house, and that is rightly the main thing. But if you spend real time in the car — driving to church, to the doctor in Ravenna, to a grandchild's game, or down to see family a couple of counties over — the coverage along those roads matters too. A phone that is solid at home but drops every call on your regular drive is still a frustration, and it is worth checking the routes you actually travel, not just your address.

The reason coverage changes on a drive is the same reason it changes room to room: you are moving past hills, valleys, and stretches that sit far from any tower. A road that dips behind a ridge can go quiet for a mile, then come right back. Highways are usually well covered because the carriers put towers along them on purpose, but the township roads and the back ways can have real gaps.

Here is how to check a route without any special tools.

- 1 On the free government map at broadbandmap.fcc.gov, or a carrier's own map, trace your regular route with your eye and note any stretches that show weak or no coverage for your network.

- 2 Better yet, have a passenger watch the bars on the actual drive — never the driver — and note where calls would struggle. A few minutes on your usual route tells you more than any map.
- 3 Pay special attention to spots where you might need the phone: a stretch where you often make calls, or a lonely road where a breakdown would leave you needing help.

GOOD TO KNOW

A dead spot on a drive is usually short — you roll out of it in a minute. The real worry is a long lonely stretch with no signal where a breakdown could strand you. For those roads, coverage matters more than price.

TIP

If your drives cross into areas where your network is thin but another is strong, that is a point in favor of a brand that reaches widely, or one that can switch networks. Match the carrier to where you actually go, not just where you sleep.

SEASONAL

21. Leaves, Weather, and the Seasons

Why your signal can change between summer and winter.

Here is something that surprises people, and it is worth knowing so you are not baffled by it: cell coverage can genuinely change with the seasons. A spot in your yard or a room in your house that holds a fine signal in January can turn weak in July — and the usual culprit is the trees. When the leaves come out in spring and fill in through summer, all that green between you and the tower absorbs some of the signal. Come fall, when the leaves drop, the signal often comes back.

Out here in Portage County, with as many wooded lots and tree-lined roads as we have, this is a real effect, not a tall tale. A house tucked behind a stand of hardwoods can notice the difference clearly. It does not mean your carrier got worse — it means the summer canopy is in the way, and it will ease when the leaves fall. Heavy, wet weather can do a milder version of the same thing, dampening a marginal signal during a big storm.

The reason to care is timing your coverage test. If you test a carrier in the dead of winter with the trees bare and decide it is perfect, you might be unpleasantly surprised in July when the leaves are full. The honest fix is to be aware of it and lean toward a carrier that is comfortably strong, not just barely passing, so you have signal to spare when summer takes a bit away.

TIP

If you can, do your coverage test in summer, with the leaves full — that is the hardest case. A carrier that is solid for you in July will almost certainly be solid in January too.

GOOD TO KNOW

If a room goes marginal only in summer, you do not necessarily need to switch carriers. Wi-Fi calling over your home internet sidesteps the leaves entirely, because the call travels over your internet line, not through the trees.

5G OR LTE

22. 5G Versus LTE at Your Address

What those little letters by the bars really mean.

Up near your signal bars, the phone shows a little label — often 5G, sometimes LTE or 4G. Folks worry about these letters more than they need to, so let us make them simple. Both 5G and LTE are perfectly good for everything a phone normally does: calls, texts, maps, email, photos, video calls with the grandkids. LTE, the older of the two, is not broken or obsolete — it works beautifully for ordinary use. 5G is newer and can be faster, but for most everyday tasks you would not notice the difference.

What matters for coverage is this: the two can reach your house differently. In some spots a carrier's older LTE signal is actually stronger and more reliable than its newer 5G, because the older signal has been built out longer and travels well over distance. In other spots the 5G is excellent. So when you test a network at your address, do not get hung up on seeing the 5G label — get hung up on whether calls are clear and pages load. A steady LTE signal beats a weak, flickering 5G every time.

There is one honest wrinkle worth knowing. The old 3G networks were shut off a few years ago, so a very old phone that only knew 3G stopped working. Any phone from the last several years handles LTE and usually 5G, so this is not a worry for a reasonably current phone — but it is why a truly ancient phone may have gone dark, and why a medical alert or a car's built-in system from years ago may have needed replacing.

GOOD TO KNOW

Do not pay extra chasing 5G if LTE is already clear and fast enough at your house. For calling, texting, and ordinary internet, a strong LTE signal does everything you need.

WATCH OUT

A phone that proudly shows 5G but drops calls is worse than one on steady LTE. Judge a network by whether it works, not by which letters it displays.

SAFETY FIRST

23. Coverage for a Medical Alert Device

When the signal has to protect someone.

A medical alert device — the kind with a button you press to call for help, worn as a pendant or a wristband — raises the stakes on coverage. For a phone, a weak spot is an annoyance. For a help button, a weak spot could mean the call for help does not go through when it is needed most. So if you or someone you care for relies on one of these, checking its coverage deserves extra care, not less.

The first thing to understand is that many of these devices work over the cell networks, just like a phone, and each one is tied to a particular carrier. So the device is only as good as that carrier's signal in the rooms where the person actually spends time — the bedroom, the bathroom, the favorite chair, the places a fall is likely. A device that shows good signal on the kitchen counter but weak signal in the bathroom is not fully doing its job, and the bathroom is exactly where falls happen.

So test it the way you would test a phone, but be thorough about the risky rooms.

- 1 Find out which network the medical alert device uses — the company will tell you, or it is in the paperwork.
- 2 Confirm that network is strong in every room the person uses, especially the bathroom, bedroom, and anywhere stairs are involved.
- 3 Many devices have a test or check-signal feature. Use it, standing in each of those rooms, not just by the base station.
- 4 If any critical room is weak, ask the device company whether a different carrier option is available, or whether the device can lean on your home Wi-Fi.

WATCH OUT

This is not medical advice, and no device replaces calling 911 in an emergency. But a help button that cannot get a signal in the bathroom is a false comfort. Test the hard rooms before you trust it.

GOOD TO KNOW

Some medical alert devices can use home Wi-Fi as a backup when cell signal is weak. If a key room is marginal, ask whether yours can, and make sure the home internet reaches that room too.

24. Working With Bill — Your Support Plan

If you would rather I test it room by room.

I have been doing hands-on technology work for more than thirty years, and checking coverage in people's homes is some of my favorite work, because the answer is so concrete. Either a network reaches your favorite chair or it does not, and once we know, the guessing is over. If the maps and settings feel like more than you want to wrestle with, this is exactly what I am here for.

A visit to your home is a flat 99 dollars. I bring test SIMs, measure each major network right in your rooms and outbuildings, find the weak spots, and tell you honestly which carrier truly covers where you live — and whether a weak room is the network or the walls. If anything we set up is not working right within thirty days, I come back and make it right at no extra charge. That is my come-back-free guarantee.

- Measure each major network inside your actual rooms, not on a map.
- Find and write down the strong and weak spots, including barns and basements.
- Set up Wi-Fi calling correctly, 911 address included, when that is the fix.
- Give you a straight answer on whether a signal booster is worth it.

The number is (330) 200-8042. If you call after hours and I cannot pick up, you will reach Sophie, my AI helper and receptionist. Sophie is friendly, takes down your name, number, and what you need, and texts it straight to me so I can get back to you. She is not a person, and she will tell you so — she is just there to make sure your message reaches me.

GOOD TO KNOW

If this guide helped you sort out your coverage, a short review really helps a local one-man shop. You can leave one at g.page/r/CSFv0jbCfFINEAE/review. Thank you kindly.

25. Your Notes

Write down your room-by-room results.

Coverage is personal to your house, so here is a page to capture what you found. Fill it in as you test, or I will fill it in with you on a visit. Having it written down means you never have to figure it out twice.

- Network that worked best overall: _____
- Favorite chair / main room: _____
- Kitchen: _____
- Back bedroom: _____
- Basement: _____
- Barn / shop / garage: _____
- Wi-Fi calling turned on? (yes/no): _____
- 911 address registered? (yes/no): _____
- Carrier / brand I chose: _____
- Things to revisit later: _____

Bill Davis — Bill's Home Tech, Atwater, Ohio, serving all of Portage County. Phone and text (330) 200-8042. If your coverage ever changes or stops matching these notes, call me and we will re-check it together.

AT A GLANCE

A Picture to Follow Along

Four Ways To Check

Quick to certain

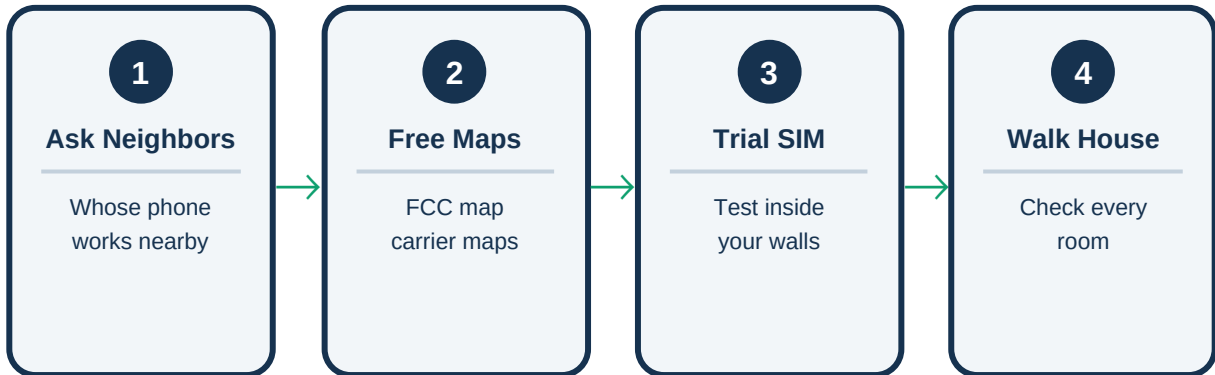
**The trial SIM is the one that cannot lie.**

Illustration — layout and details vary by model. Check your own device.

AT A GLANCE

A Second Look

Where Signal Hides

Spots that lose bars in a rural home

Spot	Signal	Why
Front porch	Strong	Open sky
Kitchen	Varies	Near windows
Basement	Weak	Underground
Back bedroom	Weak	Far wall
Metal barn	Very weak	Steel roof

Test the hard rooms, not the front porch.

Illustration — layout and details vary by model. Check your own device.

BEFORE YOU GO

A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill. I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results.



HOW I CAN HELP

Your Visit — and My Promise

In-home visit — \$99 flat for your first visit. No contracts and no surprise charges, and a 30-day follow-up is included.

Remote Support — \$49 for a screen-share session. I only connect with your permission, you watch the whole time, and you can end anytime. If I can't fix it over the screen-share, I refund the \$49 — and if it turns out you need me in person, that \$49 goes toward your visit. It's included free for Support Plan members (\$39/mo).

GOOD TO KNOW

My promise — If you're not 100% satisfied with your visit, I'll come back at no charge, or refund the full \$99. No questions, no awkwardness. That's how I'd want to be treated.

Call or text **(330) 200-8042** · Book a visit: **billshometech.com/book** · **bill@billshometech.com**

This free guide is for general information only — not professional advice, and no substitute for your device's own manual. Any prices or outside products mentioned can change; please confirm current details before you buy. Please use your own good judgment and follow it at your own risk — for anything involving electricity, gas, water, or heights, stop and call a licensed professional. Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results. © 2026 Bill's Home Tech, LLC.