

Microsoft to Help Rural Hospitals Defend Against Rising Cybersecurity Attacks



New program will address exponential growth in attacks threatening access to care for Americans and bring enterprise-quality cybersecurity to the most vulnerable rural hospitals

On Monday, Microsoft Corp. announced a new cybersecurity program to support hospitals serving more than 60 million people living in rural America. In 2023, the health care sector reported [more ransomware attacks than any other critical infrastructure sector](#), and attacks involving [ransomware against the healthcare sector were up nearly 130%](#). Cybersecurity attacks disrupt health care operations across the country and pose a direct threat to patient care and essential operations of hospitals. In rural communities these attacks can be devastating, particularly to smaller, independent Critical Access and Rural Emergency hospitals with limited means to prevent and remediate security risks and often the only healthcare option for many miles in the communities they serve.

According to the [National Rural Health Association](#), rural health clinics are one of the top targets for cyberattacks. The new Microsoft Cybersecurity Program for Rural Hospitals is designed to support the unique cybersecurity needs of these organizations and will deliver free and low-cost technology services for these hospitals, along with free training and support.

“Healthcare should be available no matter where you call home, and the rise in cyberattacks threatens the viability of rural hospitals and impact communities across the U.S.,” said Justin Spelhaug, corporate vice president, Microsoft Philanthropies. “Microsoft is committed to delivering vital technology security and support at a time when these rural hospitals need them most.”

For independent [Critical Access Hospitals](#) and [Rural Emergency Hospitals](#), Microsoft will provide nonprofit pricing and discounts for its security products optimized for smaller organizations, providing up to a 75% discount. And for some larger rural hospitals already using eligible Microsoft solutions, the company will be providing its most advanced security suite at no cost for one year. As part of the new program, the company is also providing Windows 10 security updates to participating rural hospitals for at least one year at no additional cost. Microsoft will also provide free cybersecurity assessments through Microsoft and its trusted partners to evaluate risks and gaps and offer free cybersecurity training to staff in rural hospitals to help them better manage the day-to-day security of their systems.

Today’s news was announced in close collaboration with The White House, the American Hospital Association and the National Rural Health Association. Microsoft will work with all three institutions on the rollout, adoption and effectiveness of the program.

“Cyber-attacks against the U.S. healthcare systems rose 130% in 2023, forcing hospitals to cancel procedures and impacting Americans’ access to critical care. Rural hospitals are particularly hard hit as they are often the sole source of care for the communities they serve and lack trained cyber staff and modern cyber defenses. President Biden is committed to every American having access to the care they need, and effective cybersecurity is a part of that. So, we’re excited to work with Microsoft to launch cybersecurity programs that will provide training, advice and technology to help America’s rural hospitals be safe online” said Anne Neuberger, Deputy National Security Advisory for Cyber and Emerging Technologies.

Today’s announcement is one part of Microsoft’s work in communities across the United States and around the world to improve healthcare for those living in rural areas. Through the [AI for Health](#) program, Microsoft is working with nonprofits, researchers and organizations working on global health challenges to make advances in telemedicine and improve clinical decision-making and prediction. Microsoft is also working with rural hospital leaders to rapidly bring AI solutions to market to meet their unique needs.

"Hospitals and health systems have invested significant resources to guard against cyberattacks, but they can't do it alone. Cybersecurity is a shared responsibility, and these investments from Microsoft help reinforce that," said Rick Pollack, president and CEO, the American Hospital Association. "Rural hospitals are often the primary source of healthcare in their communities, so keeping them open and safe from cyberattacks is critical. We appreciate Microsoft stepping forward to offer its expertise and resources to help secure part of America's healthcare safety net."

"Rural hospitals face a unique challenge in cybersecurity, balancing limited resources with the increasing sophistication of cyberthreats, which puts patient data and critical healthcare infrastructure at risk," said Alan Morgan, chief executive officer of NRHA. "This important partnership with Microsoft will help ensure that rural hospitals are prepared in the future to meet this rising threat in small rural facilities."

In addition to the security program for rural hospitals, Microsoft is working with community colleges to deliver the [Cybersecurity Skills Initiative](#) and through the [TechSpark program](#) to drive technology and cybersecurity job creation in partnership with local organizations. Through the [Microsoft Airband initiative](#), the company collaborates with public, private and nonprofit organizations to bring high-speed internet access to rural communities across America and build the digital infrastructure required for internet access and adoption.

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