

Windows 11 licensing for Virtual Desktops

This brief applies to all Microsoft Licensing programs.

Contents

Summary	2
Virtualization Methods	3
Azure Virtual Desktop	3
Desktops virtualized on on-premises servers or outsourcers' dedicated servers	4
Azure or Authorized Outsourcers' shared infrastructure	5
Scenarios	6
Summary Table	7

Summary

Windows 11 can be used to deploy secure and centrally managed virtual desktops to workers at scale. Customers looking to virtualize Windows 11 have a variety of ways to deploy and license their virtual machines (VMs). This brief describes how to license Windows 11 running on VMs.

Notes:

- This brief addresses Windows 11 licensing for Microsoft Commercial Licensing customers only. For the purposes of this brief, Commercial Licensing programs include all Volume License programs, CSP, and the Microsoft Customer Agreement. Windows 11 licensed solely through your OEM device generally does not include virtualization entitlements, with some exceptions. Please see your OEM license agreement for more details.
- This brief addresses Windows 11 remote virtualization (i.e., on local servers, Azure and outsourcers' servers).
- This guidance also applies to subscription licenses and licenses with Software Assurance for Windows 10.

Generally, and with limitations found below, you must have one of the following licenses to deploy and remotely access a virtual machine running Windows 11:

- Windows 10/11 Enterprise E3/E5
- Windows 10/11 Education A3/A5
- Windows 10/11 Education Student Use Benefit
- Windows 10/11 Enterprise per device with Software Assurance
- Windows VDA E3/E5
- Windows VDA per device
- Microsoft 365 F3/E3/E5
- Microsoft 365 A3/A5
- Microsoft 365 Business Premium

User licenses allow licensed users to access Windows 11 VMs from any device. **Device licenses** allow any user of the device to access Windows 11 VMs from the licensed device.

Virtualization Methods

How you can virtualize Windows 11 depends on your license, your licensing program, and the means of virtualization. Different licenses and licensing programs confer different virtualization entitlements. The below sections explain which licenses and Commercial Licensing programs offer which virtualization entitlements.

Windows 11 can be virtualized using three primary methods:

- Azure Virtual Desktop
- Desktops running on on-premises servers or other servers dedicated to the customer, including those managed by an outsourcer
- Desktops running on Azure or Authorized Outsourcers' shared infrastructure

Azure Virtual Desktop

Azure Virtual Desktop is a secure remote desktop and app virtualization service running on Azure. It's the only Cloud virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI) solution that provides support for Windows 11 multi-session, an exclusive cost optimization capability. Azure Virtual Desktop gives you full control over configuration and management and allows you to deploy and scale your Windows 11 desktops and apps in minutes with the built-in security of Azure.

- To use and access Azure Virtual Desktop with Windows 11, users must be licensed with an eligible user license. Per device licenses are not eligible for Azure Virtual Desktop.
- Eligible user licenses acquired through all Commercial Licensing programs include the entitlement to virtualize on Azure Virtual Desktop.
- (Note that some RDS CAL licenses with Software Assurance also entitle access to Windows Server sessions on Azure Virtual Desktop).

License (any Commercial Licensing program)	Azure Virtual Desktop entitlement
Windows 10/11 Enterprise E3/E5	•
Windows 10/11 Education A3/A5	•
Windows 10/11 Education/Microsoft 365 Education Student Use Benefit	•
Windows 10/11 Enterprise per device with Software Assurance	
Windows VDA E3/E5	•
Windows VDA per device	
Microsoft 365 E3/E5*	•
Microsoft 365 F3*	•
Microsoft 365 A3/A5*	•
Microsoft 365 Business Premium*	•

* Users licensed with Microsoft 365 can use and access Azure Virtual Desktop even if they aren't the primary user of a device with a Qualifying Operating System (QOS). A QOS is an underlying desktop operating system that may be "upgraded" to a higher edition of Windows. Windows Pro is the most common QOS.

Desktops virtualized on on-premises servers or outsourcers' dedicated servers

You can run Windows 11 virtual machines on your own on-premises server or on a server dedicated to you that is managed by an outsourcer. However, if the outsourcer is not deemed an Authorized Outsourcer (*see definition below*), only Windows VDA E3/E5 licenses confer virtualization entitlements. Eligible licensed users or devices may access up to four virtual machines.

Authorized Outsourcers are third parties Microsoft allows you to use to host and manage virtualized instances of your software on servers in their data centers (shared or dedicated). Authorized Outsourcers are all third party hosters that are not designated as "Listed Providers" in the document found here: <https://aka.ms/ListedProviders>.

To use and access Windows 11 virtual machines via this method,

- 1) Users or devices must be licensed with an eligible license,
- 2) Licensed users or devices must have a Qualifying Operating System (QOS) or be licensed with VDA or Microsoft 365, and
- 3) Your licenses must have been acquired through an eligible Commercial Licensing program.

	On-prem server or dedicated server managed by Authorized Outsourcer	Dedicated server managed by Listed Provider
License	All Programs	
Windows 10/11 Enterprise E3/E5	•	
Windows 10/11 Education A3/A5	•	
Windows 10/11 Education/Microsoft 365 Education Student Use Benefit		
Windows 10/11 Enterprise per device with Software Assurance	•	
Windows VDA E3/E5	•	•
Windows VDA per device	•	
Microsoft 365 F3/E3/E5	•	
Microsoft 365 A3/A5	•	
Microsoft 365 Business Premium		

Azure or Authorized Outsourcers' shared infrastructure

You can run Windows 11 in virtual machines on Azure infrastructure or Authorized Outsourcers' shared servers. The right to run your software on Authorized Outsourcers' servers is conveyed through product-specific virtualization rights and the Flexible Virtualization Benefit. Each eligible Windows 11 licensed user is entitled to access up to four virtual machines. For more information about the Flexible Virtualization Benefit, refer to the licensing brief at <https://aka.ms/FlexibleVirtualizationBenefitGuide>.

License (any Commercial Licensing program)	Azure infrastructure	Authorized Outsourcer's Shared Servers
Windows 10/11 Enterprise E3/E5	•	•
Windows 10/11 Education A3/A5	•	•
Windows 10/11 Education/Microsoft 365 Education Student Use Benefit		
Windows 10/11 Enterprise per device with Software Assurance		•
Windows VDA E3/E5	•	•
Windows VDA per device		•
Microsoft 365 F3/E3/E5	•	•
Microsoft 365 A3/A5	•	•
Microsoft 365 Business Premium		

Note: License availability varies by Commercial Licensing program. Refer to the [Product Terms](#) for more information.

Scenarios

The following examples illustrate how you can license Windows 11 virtual machines in different environments.

Scenario	Description	Licensing Solution
Mixed Windows 11 and Windows Server session desktops	Users access both Windows 11 virtual machines and Windows Server sessions (apps or desktops).	Users or devices accessing Windows 11 virtual machines and Windows Server sessions will need both an eligible Windows 11 license and Windows Server access licenses (Windows Server CAL and RDS CAL). Windows 11 desktops hosted on Windows Server would also require the same CALs.
Bring Your Own Device (BYOD)	Users bring their own devices to work and access Windows 11 virtual machines. These personal devices do not have qualifying operating systems (for example, Windows 11 Home).	Because these users do not have qualifying operating systems on their primary devices, they need a Windows VDA license or a qualifying Microsoft 365 license to access Windows 11 virtual machines.
Contractor PCs	You provide Windows 11 virtual machines for your contractors/vendors to access via their own devices.	You must assign your contractors/vendors a qualifying Microsoft 365 license or a VDA license to access your Windows 11 virtual machines.
Development/Test Windows Virtual Machines	An organization has a group of developers who need to test an application across multiple Windows 11 images running on Azure Virtual Desktop.	Users licensed with Visual Studio subscriptions or MSDN Platforms with active Software Assurance may use Azure Virtual Desktop for development and test purposes. Alternatively, these developers may access Azure Virtual Desktop under any eligible Windows or Microsoft 365 user license.

Summary Table

License	Azure Virtual Desktop	Azure infrastructure	On-prem server or Authorized Outsourcer's server (shared or dedicated)	Dedicated server managed by Listed Provider
Windows 10/11 Enterprise E3/E5	•	•	•	
Windows 10/11 Education A3/A5	•	•	•	
Windows 10/11 Education/Microsoft 365 Education Student Use Benefit	•			
Windows 10/11 Enterprise per device with Software Assurance			•	
Windows VDA E3/E5	•	•	•	•
Windows VDA per device			•	
Microsoft 365 F3/E3/E5	•	•	•	
Microsoft 365 A3/A5	•	•	•	
Microsoft 365 Business Premium	•			

Note: License availability varies by Commercial Licensing program. Refer to the [Product Terms](#) for more information.

© 2022 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. This document is for informational purposes only. MICROSOFT MAKES NO WARRANTIES, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, IN THIS DOCUMENT. This information is provided to help guide your authorized use of products you license; it is not your agreement. Your use of products licensed under your volume license agreement is governed by the terms and conditions of that agreement. In the case of any conflict between this information and your agreement, the terms and conditions of your agreement control. Prices for licenses acquired through Microsoft resellers are determined by the reseller.