UK SPEED GUIDE · JUNE 2026

TROUBLESHOOTING EXPLAINER

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Why Does My Broadband Drop *on video calls?*

Why Zoom, Teams and Google Meet freeze and drop, even on a fast line. It is usually upload and Wi-Fi, not your download speed. Here is how to find the cause and fix it.

3–4
MBPS UPLOAD FOR HD
Per person, provider figures

<30ms
JITTER FOR SMOOTH CALLS
Cisco VoIP guidance

<1%
PACKET LOSS TOLERANCE
Above this, calls break up

Written by **Dr Alex J. Martin-Smith**
Reviewed by **Adrian James**
Next review within 90 days

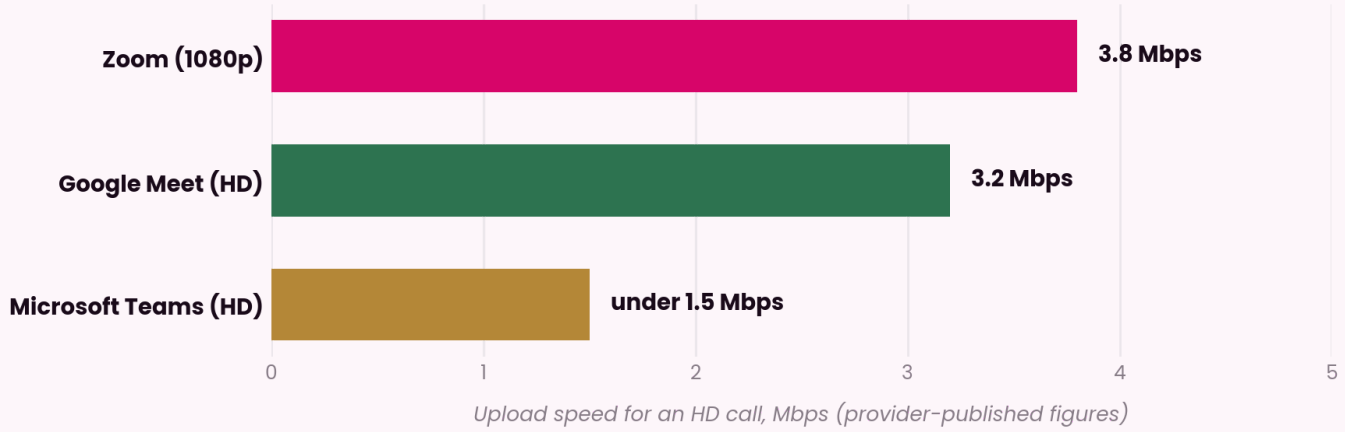
SECTION 01 · THE SHORT ANSWER

It is usually upload, not download

QUICK ANSWER

Video calls need surprisingly little speed: about **3 to 4 Mbps of upload** per person for HD. They drop because they are real-time and unforgiving, and because most UK lines have far less **upload** than download. The usual culprits are weak Wi-Fi and a stretched upload, not your headline download speed.

On a call, your device constantly **uploads** your own camera and microphone while downloading everyone else's. Upload is the scarce resource on older copper and cable lines, so this is where calls fall over first. The good news is the bar is low, as the published figures show.



Upload speed needed for an HD call, per person. Provider-published figures (Zoom, Google, Microsoft). Teams prioritises audio over video when the connection is tight.

What the main platforms ask for

PLATFORM	HD CALL	NOTE
Zoom	**3.8** Mbps up	1080p; audio-only just 60 to 80 kbps
Google Meet	**3.2** Mbps up	HD; needs latency under 50ms
Microsoft Teams	**<1.5** Mbps	Drops video before audio if stretched
FaceTime	~1 to 4 Mbps	Apple does not publish a figure; estimate

The catch is that these are per person and per call. Two or three people on calls in the same home, plus a cloud backup running, can exhaust a typical copper or cable upload long before download is troubled.

SECTION 02 · WHAT BREAKS A CALL

Three things that wreck a call

Raw speed is rarely the problem. Three quieter measures decide whether a call is smooth or stuttery, and a connection can look fast on a speed test while still failing on all three.

Latency, jitter and packet loss

MEASURE	WHAT IT IS	GOOD FOR CALLS
Latency	The delay for data to travel one way	**under 150ms**
Jitter	How much that delay varies, packet to packet	**under 30ms**
Packet loss	The share of data that never arrives	**under 1%**

Thresholds from long-standing voice and video standards (ITU-T G.114 for latency; Cisco guidance for jitter and packet loss). Lower is better on all three, and zero packet loss is ideal.

WHY CALLS SUFFER WHEN STREAMING DOES NOT

Netflix and YouTube quietly buffer several seconds ahead, so they ride out a brief wobble without you noticing. A live call cannot buffer the future, so the same wobble is heard and seen instantly as a freeze, a robotic voice or a dropped frame. That is why a line that streams 4K perfectly can still make calls painful.

THE HOME, THE LINE, OR THE FAR END

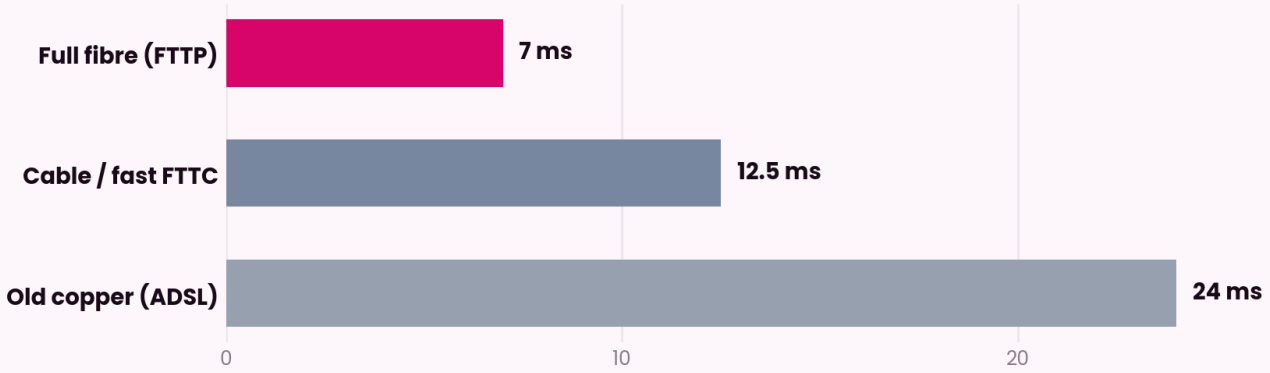
A call has three weak points: your **home network** (Wi-Fi and router), your **broadband line**, and the **far end**, meaning the other person's connection or the platform itself. Knowing which one is at fault saves a lot of wasted effort, and the next pages show how to tell them apart.

SECTION 03 · THE USUAL CAUSES

The usual culprits

Most dropped calls trace back to a short list of causes. Work down it in order, because the first two are free to fix and catch the majority of problems.

- ✓ **Weak or congested Wi-Fi.** Distance, walls and a crowded 2.4GHz band starve the call before it even reaches your line. Moving closer or switching to 5GHz often fixes it outright.
- ✓ **A stretched upload.** Cloud photo backups, a second call in the house, big file uploads or a security camera can soak up a limited upload and choke your call.
- ✓ **Bufferbloat.** On many routers, a heavy upload or download makes latency spike from around 15ms to 200ms or more, which wrecks calls even on a fast line. Quality-of-service or smart-queue settings fix it.
- ✓ **An old, high-latency line.** Copper lines carry more delay than full fibre, and that gap matters for real-time calls.



Typical latency to the router, milliseconds (Ofcom March 2023; lower is better)

Typical latency to the router by technology, Ofcom March 2023 data (the most recent published; that report has since been paused). Full fibre is the lowest, which is why it suits calls best.

A VPN adds delay too, often 10 to 30ms, and can cut your speed, so if work software allows it, turning the VPN off or routing calls around it can help noticeably.

SECTION 04 · DIAGNOSE AND FIX

Find it, then fix it

A two-minute test points you straight at the cause. Run a speed test that reports **upload and ping**, first plugged into the router with a cable, then on Wi-Fi in the room where calls drop.

WHAT YOU SEE	WHAT IT POINTS TO
Wired is fine, Wi-Fi is poor	A **Wi-Fi** coverage problem
Upload is low or maxed out	A **stretched or weak upload**
Ping jumps under load	**Bufferbloat**, fix with QoS
Only one person or app affected	The **far end**, not your line

The fixes, quickest first

1. **Get closer, or wire up.**
   Move nearer the router, switch to the 5GHz band, or plug in with Ethernet for the steadiest possible call.
2. **Clear the upload.**
   Pause cloud backups and big uploads, close bandwidth-heavy apps, and turn off the VPN if your work setup allows.
3. **Turn on QoS or smart queues.**
   Most modern routers can prioritise calls and tame the latency spikes that cause bufferbloat.
4. **If your line is the limit, upgrade to full fibre.**
   Full fibre brings high, symmetric upload and low latency, the three things calls most want. It is the real fix for a tired copper or cable line.

SECTION · REFERENCES

References and sources

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Written by **Dr Alex J. Martin-Smith** (CMgr, MBA, LLM, DBA), Lead Editor. Reviewed by **Adrian James**. Published 8 June 2026, next review within 90 days. Every figure is sourced below and logged in our public corrections process.

Every figure in this guide is backed by a publicly verifiable source, listed in APA 7th edition format. Platform bandwidth figures are the providers' own published requirements; quality thresholds come from established voice and video standards.

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REMEMBER

A fast download will not save a call if the upload is stretched or the Wi-Fi is weak. Test upload and ping, wired then on Wi-Fi, and if a tired line is the limit, check whether full fibre reaches you at broadbandswitch.uk/compare.