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HBO Max: Movies, shows, how to stream 'free,' and everything else to know

HBO Max streams big-screen movies the same day they hit theaters, with originals and big library to boot. But a megadeal clouds Max's future.



Joan E. Solsman 🐦 May 17, 2021 1:49 p.m. PT



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HBO Max no longer has a weeklong free trial.

Angela Lang/CNET

After a bumpy launch a year ago, HBO Max appears to be hitting its stride -- and now a megadeal between owner AT&T and cable programmer Discovery has clouded the shape of HBO Max to come.

HBO Max has seemed to be on an upswing. This year, all year, it's streaming new, theatrically released movies at no extra charge the same

day each film hits US cinemas: The latest are [Mortal Kombat](#), available through May 23, and [Those Who Wish Me Dead](#), a neo-Western thriller starring Angelina Jolie available through June 13. These big-name flicks, plus buzzy originals like the so-called [Snyder Cut of Justice League](#) and a [Friends reunion special](#), have attracted more people to try Max. And it has more progress coming, with a cheaper tier supported by ads set to arrive in June.

But the path for HBO Max got twistier Monday, after parent company [AT&T](#) announced it would spin off its entire [WarnerMedia](#) division where HBO Max resides. HBO Max and the rest will merge with [Discovery](#), the nonfiction TV programmer known for networks like TLC, Food Network and HGTV that also operates its own streaming service [Discovery Plus](#). Executives said the deal will accelerate both HBO Max and [Discovery Plus](#), but they didn't specify plans for how the merged company will approach its streaming services. And with a year expected to pass before this deal closes, that's a long period -- at a crucial time -- for HBO Max to be essentially be a lame duck at AT&T.

Nothing changes immediately for anyone is already subscribes to HBO Max nor for anyone curious about signing up. But for prospective members, unfortunately [HBO Max](#) has [killed its weeklong free trial](#). That means if you want to stream its originals or any of the Warner Bros. movies on its 2021 slate -- including [In the Heights](#), [Matrix 4](#) or [Dune](#) later this year -- you'll either need to pay directly for a Max subscription or figure out if your regular HBO subscription includes a free upgrade to a Max account.

That cheaper version of [HBO Max](#) is coming. The service plans to launch a [less expensive, ad-supported tier](#) in the US sometime in June, adding commercials to its programming in exchange for a discount to its now \$15-a-month subscription price. Though parent company [AT&T](#) hasn't specified the price of this cheaper tier yet, it reportedly will be [\\$10 a month](#). The new tier is missing a big draw, however: The cheaper, ad-supported subscription *won't* have any of those new Warner Bros. movies. If you want to stream those films, you have to subscribe to the pricier, ad-free level.

Here's answers to some of the latest big questions about HBO Max.

Is Spiral available on HBO Max?

Nope.

Only Warner Bros. movies stream on HBO Max the same time they're in theaters. Warner Bros. also has one of the most active movie release schedules right now, and that causes some misguided hope among people curious about other just-released flicks they'd really like to stream: Without knowing the studio that's distributing it (because, who really expects you to?), many people hope various new movies in theaters may be on Max too.

However, *Spiral*, the latest Saw franchise horror film starring Chris Rock, is distributed by Lionsgate. It isn't available on HBO Max.

When does the Friends reunion special come out?

The special, which reunites the cast to reflect on the sitcom, will premiere on May 27. Typically, new titles land on Max at 12:01 a.m. PT/3:01 a.m. ET on the day of their release.

How long are Those Who Wish Me Dead and Mortal Kombat available to stream?

All of Warner Bros.' new movies released on Max will be available to stream for 31 days total. *Mortal Kombat* will continue to stream through May 23, and *Those Who Wish Me Dead* will be available on Max through June 13.

Which Warner Bros. movies will stream on HBO Max this year? When are their release dates?

Warner Bros.' 2021 movies are set to hit theaters and HBO Max on the following release dates:

- Currently available through May 23: [Mortal Kombat](#)
- Currently available through June 13: [Those Who Wish Me Dead](#)
- June 4: [The Conjuring: The Devil Made Me Do It](#)
- June 11: [In the Heights](#)
- July 16: [Space Jam: A New Legacy](#)
- Aug. 6: [The Suicide Squad](#)
- Aug. 20: [Reminiscence](#)
- Date TBD: [Malignant](#)
- Sept. 24: [The Many Saints of Newark](#)
- Oct. 1: [Dune](#)
- Oct. 22: [Cry Macho](#)
- Nov. 19: [King Richard](#)
- Dec. 22: [Matrix](#)

All these titles will be available on HBO Max the same day they hit theaters in the US.

Any title listed with a "TBD" doesn't have a confirmed release date yet, but it's placed on the list in loose chronological order for when it's expected to come out.

But it looks like 2021 will be the only year for this phenomenon of streaming new big-screen movies on HBO Max as soon they hit theaters. Warner Bros.' recent deals with theaters suggest this so-called "day-and-date" release strategy -- when a movie premieres in theaters and on HBO Max on the same day -- won't continue into 2022. For

example, Warner Bros.' deal with Regal Cinema's parent company arranged for a 45-day theaters-only "window" starting in 2022, which means theaters will get at least a month and a half to screen new movies without any competition from a streaming service.

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What time do new Warner Bros. movies arrive? When do they disappear?

Generally, most of the new Warner Bros. movies become available to stream on Max at 12:01 a.m. PT/3:01 a.m. ET on the day of their release. But the timing for other movies may vary, depending on when the first cinematic screenings take place at theaters. Wonder Woman 1984, for example, became available at 9 a.m. PT/noon ET on Dec. 25 because that was the earliest theaters were open that day.

The movies will be available to stream on HBO Max for 31 days. They're generally expected to be removed from the service at 11:59 p.m. PT on that 31st day.

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All Warner Bros. movies released in this "hybrid" model on HBO Max will be available to watch in 4K Ultra HD resolution and HDR image quality, even though those formats aren't yet standard for the full Max library.

Does it cost extra to watch these new theatrical movies on HBO Max?

No. Everything on Warner Bros.' 2021 slate of new movies will be available on HBO Max at no added cost to subscribers -- in other words, feels like free. Since HBO Max doesn't have a free trial, you'll either need to sign up with a paying membership or upgrade an existing HBO subscription to include Max.

If you already have HBO from a TV provider or a tech company, or you paid for HBO Now, you may be able to upgrade to Max at no added cost

-- it depends whether HBO Max has struck a deal with your specific provider. And some AT&T customers have deals to get Max included in their service plans. See the section on "How do I get HBO Max if I already pay for HBO?" for more details.

Does HBO Max offer a free trial?

Not anymore. HBO Max eliminated its standard one-week free trial in December. But it does occasionally offer promotions and bundling deals. (See the next section.)

Do I get HBO Max 'free' if I already have regular HBO?

Some people who already have an existing subscription to HBO are able to unlock HBO Max at no extra cost, but not everyone. Nearly 200,000 regular HBO subscribers in the US aren't eligible for an HBO Max upgrade; it all depends on which company provides your regular HBO subscription.

But many HBO Max distributors unlock an HBO Max upgrade at no extra cost for current HBO and legacy HBO Now customers, thanks to deals HBO Max struck with them. You qualify for the HBO Max upgrade at no extra cost if you already pay for HBO through the following:

- AT&T (HBO's parent company) and DirecTV, U-verse, AT&T TV Now, AT&T TV and AT&T wireless users who can add HBO with certain unlimited plans.
- Charter and its Spectrum services.
- YouTube TV or Google.
- Apple.
- Hulu.
- Altice USA and its Optimum and Suddenlink services.
- Verizon and its Fios services.
- Cox Communications.
- The NCTC group of independent cable and broadband companies -- that includes WOW!, Atlantic Broadband, RCN, Grande Communications & Wave, MCTV and others. (Check if your pay-TV provider is an NCTC member.)
- Comcast X1 and Flex customers.
- Amazon Prime Video Channels.

If you previously paid for an HBO streaming subscription through Roku (that is, through The Roku Channel), you need to cancel that subscription and then sign up for HBO Max itself to be able to access Max.

How much does HBO Max cost?

HBO Max is \$15 a month. It doesn't have a free trial, but the company occasionally offers discounts if you prepay for an extended period of time. For example, before launch, people who preordered the service at HBOMax.com unlocked a discount deal that lowered the price to \$13 a month for the first year. Some customers can also hunt out specialized free trials, sometimes linked to the purchase of a television or other tech product.

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6 best movies to stream on HBO Max

AT&T, the parent company of both HBO Max and Warner Bros., is also offering a complicated matrix of promos for HBO Max for its own customers. Some AT&T customers get Max at no extra cost, while others qualify for a one-month, three-month or one-year free trial. Your best shot at figuring out whether you qualify is to check your account or the myAT&T app, but CNET also lists AT&T's qualification terms for its [HBO Max promos](#).

A cheaper tier with advertising is on the way. [HBO Max will launch a lower-priced, ad-supported version](#) in June. The company hasn't set a price yet for this cheaper tier. And this lower-priced level has a major limitation: It won't include any of the brand-new Warner Bros. movies. If you want to stream any of them when they first hit theaters, you'll have to be on the costlier, ad-free subscription.

Compared with rival streaming services, HBO Max's \$15-a-month pricing may feel steep. Disney Plus is \$7 a month, going up to \$8 a month in March; and [Apple TV Plus](#) is \$5, though it keeps extending free trials for anyone who's bought a new Apple gadget. But HBO Max's price is close to [Netflix's](#) most popular plan, which is \$14.

Shows and movies: What else can I watch?

Generally, HBO Max includes all the shows and movies on HBO, plus a selection of high-profile licensed content, like Friends, The Big Bang Theory, Rick & Morty and South Park. It layers [exclusive original programming](#) on top of that. And all of Warner Bros. 2021 theatrical movies will be released on Max the same day as they hit cinemas, available to stream for 31 days at no extra cost.

Now that the service is live, an easy way to see what's available without signing up is third-party catalog search services like [Reelgood](#).

The simplest part of the catalog to understand is HBO itself. HBO Max includes everything on regular HBO, so that means all the theatrical movies that come and go from the channel; new episodes from all HBO series, like *Euphoria* and *Last Week Tonight With John Oliver*; and the past seasons of those programs as well as the full HBO back catalog, like *Game of Thrones*, *Silicon Valley*, *Veep* and *The Wire*; plus all of HBO's original films, documentaries and specials.

Movies are a crucial part of the catalog. And any movie that's available to watch on the traditional HBO network will also be available to stream on HBO Max.

Beyond that, HBO Max has padded itself with more content than you'll find on regular HBO, for basically the same price. The service has been pouring billions of dollars into its budgets for original programming and into expensive deals to stream titles from [DC](#), [Studio Ghibli](#) and the [Criterion Collection](#), as well as popular shows like [Friends](#), [South Park](#), [The Big Bang Theory](#), [Rick and Morty](#), [Doctor Who](#) and new episodes of [Adventure Time](#).

The service's Max Originals also offer new, exclusive shows and movies. Some of the most popular Max originals so far: [Justice League Snyder Cut](#), which was released in March; [The Flight Attendant](#), a comedic thriller series starring Kaley Cuoco; [Raised by Wolves](#), a sci-fi series from famed filmmaker Ridley Scott; and *The Witches*, a reboot of the classic Roald Dahl book and 1990 film, starring Octavia Spencer and Anne Hathaway.

HBO Max also has podcasts in its library linked to its programming, along the lines of last year's [podcast companion to the miniseries Chernobyl](#). *Raised by Wolves*, for example, has a podcast available now on Max.

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Where can I sign up for HBO Max?

The simplest way to get HBO Max is to sign up for it directly at hbomax.com.

On Apple devices, HBO Max has an iOS app for iPhone and iPad, which allows you to sign up and pay through an in-app purchase. Apple also integrates HBO Max into its own TV app, which allows you to congregate certain streaming channels to watch them in one place.

Through Google, HBO Max has an app for Android phones and tablets in the Google Play store, and you'll be able to sign up inside the app with an in-app purchase. You'll also be able to stream HBO Max on Android TV, Chromebook and Google Chromecast. If you previously subscribed to HBO Now through Google Play, you're automatically able to log in to HBO Max at no additional charge, and you'll continue to be billed through Google. And YouTube TV, the streaming pay-TV service operated by Google's YouTube, will also carry HBO Max.

Roku also allows people to sign up for HBO Max directly on its devices using its payment system, Roku Pay. And people with Samsung Smart TVs that support the HBO Max app can sign up directly there too.

What devices support HBO Max?

HBO Max is available on a variety of devices.

- Most Apple devices that can stream video support HBO Max -- iPhone, iPad, iPod Touch, Apple TV 4K and Apple TV HD. However, customers with second- and third-generation Apple TV models will need to stream HBO Max content from their iPhone or iPad to their TV with AirPlay.
- Google's Android operating system for phones and tablets has an app for Android TV devices, Chromebooks, Google Chromecast and Chromecast built-in devices will support HBO Max too.
- Sony's PlayStation 4 systems can download the HBO Max app via the PlayStation Store.
- Microsoft's Xbox One gaming consoles have the HBO Max app via the Microsoft Store.
- Select Samsung internet-connected smart TVs -- models from 2016 through 2020 -- can download and purchase HBO Max directly.
- Amazon Fire TV devices and Fire tablets have support for HBO Max's app
- Roku devices support HBO Max for streaming and for signing up to the service as a new user.

When will HBO Max launch elsewhere?

HBO Max launched May 27, 2020, in the US.

HBO Max's first international expansion kicked off a month later with 39 territories across Latin America and the Caribbean. Those territories include:

Anguilla, Antigua, Argentina, Aruba, B.V.I., Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Cayman Islands, Chile,

HBO Max brokered a reported \$425 million deal for all episodes of '90s hit Friends, which exited Netflix to start streaming on HBO Max at launch.

NBC

Colombia, Costa Rica, Curacao, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Montserrat, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Suriname, Trinidad & Tobago, Turks and Caicos, Uruguay and Venezuela.

After that, the HBO-branded streaming services in Europe -- including the Nordics, Spain, Central Europe, and Portugal -- are scheduled to be upgraded to HBO Max later this year.

What product features does HBO Max have?

In a long-anticipated feature for anyone who previously used HBO Go, HBO Max has downloads for its mobile apps.

HBO Max allows you to stream to three different devices simultaneously. By comparison, Disney Plus allows four simultaneous streams, and Netflix allows between one and four depending on how much you pay each month.

You can also create up to five profiles to keep recommendations separate for different members of the household, and it also has kid accounts that are unlocked by entering a PIN. These parental controls allow moms and dads to set the maturity levels of the programming each kids' profile can access, based on ratings like PG and TV-14.

Another missing element: HBO Max doesn't offer 4K resolution nor high dynamic range image quality for most of its catalog. The exception is all the theatrical movies that Warner Bros. is releasing on HBO Max the same day as cinemas; all those films will be available in 4K Ultra HD and HDR.



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