Azure Stack FAQ Library – as of Nov 2021

**This is a MS Confidential library of answers to commonly asked questions for partner use.**

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# New Feature Update for Azure Stack HCI (as of Nov 2021)

## What is new with the Azure Stack HCI first feature update since GA?

There is a large list of new features now becoming available under 3 major themes with key examples (not the exhaustive list). Check out [What’s new in Azure Stack HCI documentation](https://docs.microsoft.com/en-us/azure-stack/hci/whats-new) to learn more.

1. Azure workloads and benefits – Azure Virtual Desktop for Azure Stack HCI (preview), Arc-enabled PaaS services

2. Azure management & governance – Multi-cluster monitoring for Azure Stack HCI (preview), Azure Resource Manager integration

3. Azure Infrastructure innovation – GPU integration, dynamic processor compatibility

## Are these new features also available in Windows Server?

This feature update greatly increases the differentiation between the Azure Stack HCI host OS and the general server OS. Most of the new features are deployable on Azure Stack HCI only. A few features are available for both Azure Stack HCI and Windows Server such as thin provisioning.

## Is there a price change to use these new Azure Stack HCI features?

No. These new features are delivered as part of the Azure Stack HCI subscription model. As of October 19, 2021, deployments using Azure Stack HCI are eligible for production-level technical support and are billed at the regular non-preview price.

## How do I get this new feature update for Azure Stack HCI?

The new Azure Stack HCI is the recommended version for all new deployments and is available by downloading the software from [www.azure.com/hci](http://www.azure.com/hci). For existing customers, the new feature update for Azure Stack HCI is available as an over-the-air update.

## How does this new feature update change the hybrid offering from Microsoft?

Microsoft is committed to innovation in hybrid computing. This new feature update reflects innovation with a deeper integration between Azure Arc & Azure Stack HCI. As part of this new feature update, all Azure Stack HCI nodes are now Arc-enabled which opens new opportunities for management and, governance of infrastructure resources and virtual machines – see [video](https://aka.ms/everynodeArcenabled).

## Does this new feature update force any change in the deployment models (integrated systems and validated nodes)?

This new update provides support for Secured-core server which is a new layer of security across hardware, firmware, and software and as such all integrated systems sold with the new feature update installed will be Secured-core server enabled.

## Where can I learn more about the new feature update for Azure Stack HCI?

Learn more about the Azure Stack HCI new feature update here:

* [What’s new in Azure Stack HCI Documentation](https://docs.microsoft.com/en-us/azure-stack/hci/whats-new)
* [www.azure.com/hci](http://www.azure.com/hci)
* [Learn everything about the new Azure Stack HCI feature update](https://myignite.microsoft.com/sessions/7384a019-3100-4153-bd18-6a9520c11498?source=sessions) – Ignite Session

# Azure Stack HCI – Top Questions

**This section will be public facing.**

## What is Azure Stack HCI?

Azure Stack HCI is hyperconverged infrastructure host platform integrated with Azure from Microsoft. Run Windows and Linux virtual machines on-premises with existing IT skills and familiar tools. Delivered as an Azure subscription service, Azure Stack HCI is always up-to-date and can be installed on your choice of server hardware. Easily extend your infrastructure with Azure hybrid services for monitoring at scale, backup, and more.

## What can I use Azure Stack HCI for?

Datacenter modernization, Remote/Branch office scenarios, SQL Server based virtual applications, Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (Azure Virtual Desktop for Azure Stack HCI), running Kubernetes clusters are some of the most popular use cases for Azure Stack HCI.

## Will I be able to move my current Azure Stack HCI solution based on Windows Server 2019 to Azure Stack HCI?

There would be little direct benefit in doing so. The simplest way to take advantage of the benefits of the new Azure Stack HCI platform is to re-install.

## How do I buy Azure Stack HCI?

There are 3 components needed: 1-Hardware (from a partner or leveraging your existing hardware investments if it matches a solution in the Azure Stack HCI catalog) 2-Azure subscription 3-An Azure support contract.

# Azure Stack HCI – Rude Questions

**Reactive only. Do not share directly with customers, this section is to inform you as a partner how to possibly handle questions on these related topics.**

## Is Windows Server dead?

No. We continue to invest in Windows Server features and functionality, and our customers rely on Windows Server as the multi-purpose operating system to run many of their on-premises server workloads, as well as many of their virtual machines in public clouds.

In addition, Windows Server technology powers Azure, Azure Stack Hub, and the new Azure Stack HCI solutions. (Hyper-V, Storage Spaces Direct, and more.)

## Isn’t this just a re-packaging of Windows Software Defined Data Center features?

No, this is a redesign of the host software and a new subscription model that brings new functionality to the host.

## I bought a WSSD 2016 solution, is that investment worth anything?

Yes, that investment is still supported and provides a good way to run your workloads if you are on that version of Windows Server.

## I bought an Azure Stack system, is this investment still worth anything?

Yes. Azure Stack Hub (formerly known as Azure Stack) is the Microsoft solution for running Azure services as a cloud on prem. For the parts of your IT estate that need a cloud experience (self-service, DevOps tooling, Cloud PaaS services, etc.), Azure Stack Hub is the best solution for that. For the parts of your IT estate that need to run more like traditional server infrastructure, adding Azure Stack HCI solutions as needed is now a great option with even more hybrid capabilities and subscription model.

I need to run hundreds of Windows VMs on my platform, won't this new HCI host product increase my cost significantly?

While your cost will increase due to a new platform cost as a customer you are also getting extra value from this increase. You are getting fleet management and monitoring at scale, ability to create VMs through the Azure portal, an always up to date solution, stretch clustering, no cost Extended Support for Windows Server 2008/R2, a much easier support experience and a richer choice of hardware solutions.

## Aren’t your primary competitors in this area companies you also partner with, like VMware?

We are here to offer customers choice, and to help them find the right solution for their business needs. That might be Azure Stack HCI, or it might be another solution, including one from partners we work closely with. It’s all about customer choice.

## How is Azure Stack HCI different from the Windows Server based HCI solution launched May 2019?

In May 2019, when we brought Azure Stack HCI into early preview, we demonstrated how we were bringing more Azure to Windows. The most significant benefit of the new Azure Stack HCI comes via re-platforming to Azure. For customers, we engineered this change to give them cloud support, as well as integration with Azure Arc and Azure management.

This is not licensed like Windows, it is an Azure subscription, we have made them two separate products. Windows Server will retain some of the HCI features, but new HCI investments and further integration with Azure and delivery as an Azure subscription are unique in Azure Stack HCI. Proof of this commitment is the new feature update which adds multiple features that are unique to Azure Stack HCI only.

# Introduction and Overview

## How does Azure Stack HCI advance Microsoft’s hybrid cloud computing strategy?

Microsoft is viewed as the leader for hybrid cloud, this new Azure Stack HCI offers customers the only cloud connected hyperconverged offering with built-in integration with Azure Arc in the market. Azure Stack HCI will appeal to many customers who still need to run key workloads on-prem but also want to start their journey to the cloud. This further diversifies and differentiates the Microsoft hybrid portfolio.

## What are the compelling new features in the latest update that should influence my purchasing decision for this new product vs. same deployment using Windows Server 2019?

At the features level there are the following differences: stretch geo cluster, ability to view and monitor HCI fleet in Azure portal, new HCI cluster deployment wizard, self-service VMs through Azure Arc, GPU integration, thin provisioning, soft kernel reboot, network ATC integration just to name a few of the latest features in addition to more complete security stack including Secured-core server.

# Availability, Pricing, Licensing, and Support Details

## What is the price of Azure Stack HCI?

Azure Stack HCI is an Azure Service with a price of USD $10/per physical core per month.

## How do I buy Azure Stack HCI?

There are 3 components needed: 1-Hardware (from a partner or leveraging your existing hardware investments if it matches a solution in the Azure Stack HCI catalog) 2-Azure subscription 3-An Azure support contract.

## Can I use existing licenses of SQL Server or Windows Server with Azure Stack HCI?

Yes, just as existing Windows licenses (non-OEM license) can be used for guest VMs. SQL Server is like any other software you run on this system; it needs to be licensed separately.

## How is the guest licensing delivered?

Guest licensing is not part of the Azure Stack HCI subscription. To facilitate guest licensing for Azure Stack HCI customers, we announced a new offer that brings simplicity and more flexibility for licensing.  The new Windows Server subscription for Azure Stack HCI is available in public preview as of December 14, 2021. This offer will allow you to purchase unlimited Windows Server guest licenses for your Azure Stack HCI cluster through your Azure subscription. You can sign up and cancel anytime and preview pricing is $0 until general availability (GA).  At GA, the offer will be charged at $23.60 per physical core per month and the price includes all the required CALs.  This offer simplifies billing through an all-in-one place Azure subscription and in some cases will be less expensive for customers than the traditional licensing model.

Does the Azure Hybrid Use Benefit apply to Azure Stack HCI?

No. The Azure Hybrid Use Benefit (AHUB) only applies to Windows Server in Azure.

Can I use any hardware to run Azure Stack HCI?

No. Any customer support for Azure Stack HCI that may be available from Microsoft requires that Azure Stack HCI runs on server hardware pre-validated by Microsoft under the Azure Stack HCI Program Agreement or any successor. For clarity, the validated Solutions are presented in the [Azure Stack HCI Catalog](https://hcicatalog.azurewebsites.net/#/).

Are Extended Security Updates (ESU) available at no cost when migrating my Windows Server 2008/R2 workloads to the new Azure Stack HCI?

You'll get extended security updates at no cost when you migrate your Windows Server 2008/R2, SQL Server 2008/R2, Windows Server 2012/R2 and SQL Server 2012 workloads to Azure Stack HCI.

If I obtain the Azure Stack HCI Subscription (HOST OS) do I still need to buy a Windows Server (GUEST OS) license?

It depends. If you will be running Windows virtual machines (VM), you will need a GUEST license for these machines. You can use either Windows Server Standard or Windows Server Datacenter edition depending on the number of Windows VMs you will be running.

How can I obtain my Windows Server license/ GUEST OS?

You can obtain your license through any of the Microsoft Authorized Distribution channels that sells Windows Server licenses and is available in Volume Licensing, Web-Direct, CSP or OEM. The new Azure Stack HCI does not change any of these existing motions. Note that the OEM license can only be used if customer has bought reassignment rights with the license.

Can I use Azure Stack HCI without Windows Server when I am running open-source solutions?

Yes, but make sure that the open-source solutions you are using does not have other licensing requirements.

Can I license my Windows Server VM’s license with my Azure Stack subscription?

No, you can obtain your Windows VMs licensing as described in the question above ‘How can I obtain my Windows Server license/GUEST OS?’

Can I migrate from Windows Server 2019 to Azure Stack HCI?

There is no in-place migration possible from WS2019 to Azure Stack HCI. To migrate to Azure Stack HCI a customer needs to export VMs and storage, installing Azure Stack HCI on the hardware and then importing the VMs and storage.

Can I run my workloads directly on Azure Stack HCI outside of VMs?

No, this is not possible with Azure Stack HCI as a HOST. If a customer needs to run directly “on the metal”, Windows Server is better option. For Azure Stack HCI, customers can run VMs or containers if they also use Azure Kubernetes Service on Azure Stack HCI.

How is the GUEST OS licensed?

For each physical HOST running Windows guests (or VMs), you need either a valid Windows Server Standard (max 2 VMs) or Windows Server Datacenter (unlimited VMs) edition for the GUEST OS. The choice of which edition will depend on the number of guests you are running.

What happens when I stop my Azure Stack HCI subscription?

You will stop incurring monthly charges from the moment the subscription is stopped. You will also lose the ability to use the software.

Do I have to update with Annual updates every year, can I choose when to update?

The Azure Stack HCI operating system is supported by Microsoft for two years, with annual feature updates that the customer has up to one year to deploy.

Do I need CALs for Azure Stack HCI?

There are no services/workloads that can run on Azure Stack HCI host therefore no CALs are needed. If Windows VMs are running on Azure Stack HCI, these will require appropriate CALs. If customers are using the Windows Server subscription service for Azure Stack HCI public preview that we announced in December 2021, CALs are included - [Learn more](https://aka.ms/WSGUESTforHCI).

Can I disable cores to save costs?

Yes, you can disable cores through the system configuration window. A scenario where this can be helpful is when you want to scale memory and storage by adding nodes and not adding to cost of the solution, you can disable the extra cores added.

How do I count the cores for the guest OS?

You will assign the number of virtual cores you want to assign to each VM. Note that these virtual cores are the not the cores that determines the pricing of the solutions. The pricing of the solution is based on the physical core in each socket of the server.

Can I migrate from Azure Stack HCI to Windows Server 2019?

This would require a complete rebuild, there is no in-place migration capabilities. The process to migrate is the reverse of what has been described in the questions above ‘Can I migrate from Windows Server 2019 to Azure Stack HCI?’

I want my sales team to demo Azure Stack HCI, do you have a free license for demo purposes?

Azure Stack HCI has a free 60-day trial built in.

Does AVMA work on Azure Stack HCI – Do I need to purchase the Windows Server license separately?

Regardless of the mechanism used, customer needs to have valid Windows Server licenses if they are running Windows VMs on Azure Stack HCI. Automatic Virtual Machine Activation (AVMA) is a proof-of-purchase mechanism, helping to ensure that Windows products are used in accordance with the Product Use Rights and Microsoft Software License Terms. AVMA lets you install virtual machines on a properly activated Windows server without having to manage product keys for each individual virtual machine. AVMA is available in the current release of Azure Stack HCI.

If I don’t like my CSP, can I switch my CSP? How? What happens to my support plan?

You can switch CSPs for Azure Stack HCI via Azure portal, the same way you would switch your CSP with any regular Azure subscription.

Is there any way I can purchase ESU for my SQL 2008?

No, Extended support for SQL Server 2008 and SQL Server 2008 R2 ended on July 10, 2019. However, you'll get extended security updates at no cost when you migrate your Windows Server 2008/R2, SQL Server 2008/R2, Windows Server 2012/R2 and SQL Server 2012 workloads to Azure Stack HCI.

Can I run Kubernetes on the host partition?

No, the way to run Kubernetes on Azure Stack HCI is to deploy Azure Kubernetes Service for Azure Stack HCI (AKS on HCI is now GA). This service runs as a VM on the Azure Stack HCI host.

Can I run Windows Server IoT 2019 in the guest VM?

No, Windows Server IOT can only be used in fixed function scenarios as part of an OEMs IOT solution.

Can a customer who has purchased validated OEM hardware + an OEM Windows Server 2019 Datacenter license upgrade their server to Azure Stack HCI and reuse that license for unlimited Windows Server guest VMs running on Azure Stack HCI?

Yes, this is permitted under licensing terms.

Can a customer who has purchased a server with an OEM Windows Server 2019 Datacenter license purchase a new server with Azure Stack HCI and use their previously purchased OEM Windows Server Datacenter license to provide unlimited Windows Server VMs on the newly purchased server?

This is possible only if the OEM Datacenter license included Reassignment Rights.

What if the customer wants to complete a Side-by-Side migration, can the customer re-use the Windows 2019 ROK License as the workload license for the new cluster node? (This will be different HW).

If a reassignment license was purchased with the DC, the customer may move the software to a new system no more often than every 90 days.

# Technical Details

## Can I connect a cluster based on this new product to a non-Azure public cloud?

Once the complete integration with Arc is complete, theoretically the answer is yes. Practically the easiest way to benefit from public cloud services is through Azure with the integration that exists in Windows Admin Center.

## Can HCI clusters based on Windows Server 2019 and clusters based on Azure Stack HCI be managed by the same tool?

Yes, for example Windows Admin Center and System Center.

## Can I install Azure Stack HCI on existing hardware?

Yes, as long as the hardware matches the capability of one of the validated node configurations in the Azure Stack HCI catalog.

## I would prefer to be totally disconnected from any public cloud, does that eliminate this product from my consideration?

Yes, it does eliminate Azure Stack HCI from your consideration. Azure Stack HCI is based on a subscription model and has a dependency on customers having an Azure subscription. As such, these HCI clusters need to be connected to Azure for a certain minimum time a month.

## Do Azure Stack HCI based solutions use System Center?

It can if this is the preferred tool from the customer point of view.

## How much can Azure Stack HCI scale?

The solution scales to 16 nodes (or servers), which can support hundreds of VMs depending on the configuration. Azure Stack HCI also supports Cluster Sets which brings scalability up to hundreds of nodes (64 nodes have been tested).

Who manages Azure Stack HCI – Microsoft or the customer?

The customer is responsible for managing Azure Stack HCI or a partner on the customer’s behalf if they want to use an SI/CSP who offers managed services.

## Does Azure Stack HCI support disconnected scenarios like Azure Stack Hub?

No, Azure Stack HCI has a minimum time a month it needs to be connected to Azure.

## Will Azure Stack HCI work with Azure “Sovereign” clouds?

Yes, check [Azure Updates](https://azure.microsoft.com/en-us/updates/?query=hci) on a regular basis.

## What is the upgrade path from the previous Azure Stack HCI Program (Windows Server 2019) to Azure Stack HCI?

There is no in-place migration possible from Windows Server 2019 to Azure Stack HCI. To migrate to Azure Stack HCI a customer needs to export VMs and storage, installing Azure Stack HCI on the hardware and then importing the VMs and storage.

## Will there be an enforcement cadence for product updates?

Yes, we will require re-validation if you intend to support the platform for 5+ years.

## Will the HCI features (S2D/SDN) be in Windows Server vNEXT?

Yes, for vNext (2022), no commitment beyond that.

## Will Microsoft block support on non-validated deployments?

For non-validated deployment, support will be “best effort” with no SLA guarantee.

## Are there different Azure services that will be available on the integrated system form factor than on the validated node?

No, the same Azure services will be offered for both levels of solutions

## What does "5 years of support" mean exactly?

The solution builder (typically this is a hardware partner) must agree that the customer can purchase 5 years of support from the time they purchase the solution until one year after the release of the HCI version.  An example would be a customer must be able to purchase 5 years of support for Azure Stack HCI v1 up to September xx 2021 (example date only).

Software support means:

You will receive a monthly update from Microsoft with security fixes, quality fixes, and possibly features. You will also be able to click “New support request” in the Azure Portal or call us and we will help you.

# Partner (SI/MSP) Rude Q&A

## As a solution partner, what does this new feature update change for me?

If you’re offering an integrated system as a deployment model, you now need to integrate Secured-core server in your validation process with Microsoft.

I am a partner working validating this new platform, what are my revenue opportunities?

For solution partners revenues come from hardware and associated services they can provide to their customer. Cloud Solution Providers (CSP) can gain revenue by selling Azure subscription (needed to run Azure Stack HCI) and any of the Azure services customers want to install on their HCI clusters.

I am a Cloud Solution Provider; how can I participate in the sale of Azure Stack HCI?

Any CSP partner (T1 or T2) has full access to the entire Azure portfolio of solutions, no special "enablement" needed.

As a partner offering solutions based on Azure Stack HCI, what are my support obligations?

Hardware support is through the hardware provider, like any other Microsoft OS product including 3rd party firmware and drivers.  Microsoft’s Azure Stack HCI software support is provided by Microsoft’s product support based on the customer’s entitlements.  Any current support contract or other entitlement that allows for Azure support, for instance Premier/Unified contracts that include Azure support, as well as Azure Standard and Pro Direct.  Starting a support incident is based on the entitlement where Premier/Unified customers will use their normal portal and those using Azure standard and pro-direct will use the Azure portal in the support page, like the support for other Azure products. For more information about Azure support plans reference this page: <https://azure.microsoft.com/en-in/support/plans/>. Partners may have requirements to provide Azure Stack HCI software support, if they are part of a program that includes the requirement.  Partners may also choose to provide support and services for Azure Stack HCI.

For new hardware loaded with the new HCI host, can the OEM also install on the metal the WS DC to fulfill the unlimited "guest rights" for VMs on the HCI platform?

Only one OS can be installed at once on the host OS. Windows Server License(s) for guest rights, it is recommended to add the license "in the box" at point of sale.

How can we inject the product key into the OS so that it is activated when the customer receives it?

The product is activated upon installation and no product key is required.

Are you thinking of requirements related to BIOS such as OEM activation?

Yes. There are requirements for pre-install of the OS for the OEM to get MDF/JMA and activation bounties.  There will also be requirements for BIOS changes for Integrated Systems to correctly identify systems and pay out funds to OEMs. Note these requirements are different than OA2.x

Will the HLK and SDDC AQ align to the HCI cadence?

Solution will align to HCI cadence. Windows Server certification will align with LTSC.

Will the media be physical or digital?

This will be digital delivery, no DVDs.

Will there be any pre-install or activation bounty for the OEM?

Yes, this will be managed through the Technical Quality Program – partner participation may vary and maybe subject to additional requirements to qualify.