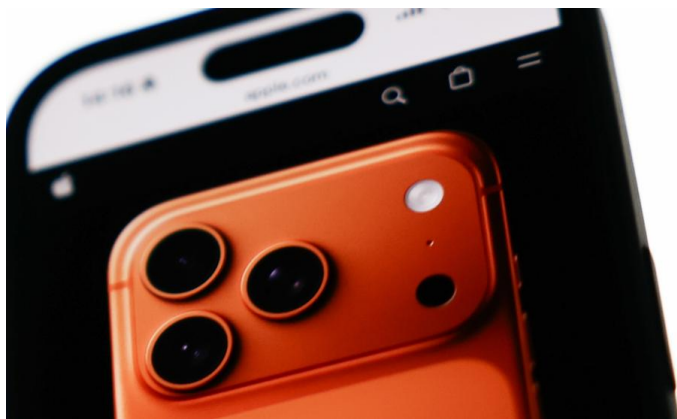


Zak Doffman Sep 23, 2025 at 01:33am EDT



This security update is critical.
NurPhoto via Getty Images

Apple has suddenly revealed a surprising new security update for iPhone users, coming with the next iPhone update — [iOS 26.1](#). This new update protects users from security issues “more quickly,” including exploits that “exist in the wild.”

Apple’s “[Rapid Security Responses](#)” were introduced in 2023, a little-known feature designed to “deliver important security improvements between software updates,” without all the rigmarole of an iOS update.

“By default,” Apple tells users, “your device automatically applies Rapid Security Responses. If necessary, you’ll be prompted to restart your device.”

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With iOS 26.1 — in beta as of yesterday — those rapid security updates will change. Per [MacWorld](#), “according to code discovered in the beta,” it’s clear “the system will soon be called Background Security Improvements. The feature doesn’t seem to be available to users running the beta, but its existence in the code suggests it’s coming soon.”

The new system “serves the same purpose” as the original, *MacWorld* says, “but there’s a key difference between Rapid Security Responses and the new Background Security Improvements: The new Background Security Improvements will be installed silently on the device without needing to manually update. Previously, users had to download Rapid Security Responses through the Settings app just like any other iOS update.”

That seamless updating is a critical step to ensure rapid deployment of critical updates as soon as they’re released, without user inertia kicking in. “The code suggests Apple plans to make these automatic patches optional once the system becomes available.”

Apple says “if necessary,” with the current system, “you’ll be prompted to restart your device.” It’s unclear if that will ever happen with the iOS 26.1 update. The background system also enables a rollback if an update goes awry post-release.

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This system is not only little-known, it’s also little-used. But Apple’s crackdown on spyware is ramping up, as seen with [new memory defenses](#) with this year’s iPhone 17 and iPhone Air. Silent, background updates may also become more critical.

MacWorld says “the new Background Security Improvements are also coming to other Apple platforms, including macOS. There are no details on when iOS 26.1 will be released to the public, but we expect it to be released sometime in October.”

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Apple’s ability to update everyone, everywhere when it comes to iPhone security fixes is a major selling point. On Android, only [Google can do the same](#) with its Pixel devices. When it comes to the Apple versus Samsung battle of the flagships, this stands out as a major issue for the Galaxy-maker, and one that’s not getting any better.

“When a Rapid Security Response has been applied,” Apple says, “a letter appears after the software version number, as in this example: macOS 13.3.1 (a).”