Turn off Wi-Fi Sense

Wi-Fi Sense is a new feature in Windows 10 that is designed to make connecting to wireless networks easier. However, you will probably want to turn off Wi-Fi Sense to protect your privacy.

Wi-Fi Sense's goal is to make using wireless networks easier, particularly among friends. Unfortunately, it's also raises a number of privacy concerns.

To top it off, it's enabled by default.

Let's look at what it is, why it may or may not be an issue, and, perhaps most importantly, how to turn it off.

Wi-Fi Sense automatically connects devices to wireless networks in two different scenarios.

First, it will automatically connect your device to open Wi-Fi hotspots that others have connected to in the past. "Others", here, means other users of Windows 10 that have Wi-Fi Sense enabled.

Second, it will automatically connect your device to Wi-Fi hotspots – open or not – that your friends have connected to in the past. According to Microsoft, "friends" are your "Facebook friends, Outlook.com contacts, or Skype contacts". What makes this interesting is that you can connect to their networks even if those networks are password protected, *without knowing the password*. Wi-Fi Sense just connects you without showing you those passwords.

How does Wi-Fi Sense get those passwords? Simply because your friends have enabled Wi-Fi Sense on their Windows 10 computers. And you probably have it enabled as well – because it's on by default.

What this means is that it's possible for anyone in your email contacts list to connect to your password-protected wireless network without needing to know the password… because you shared it with Wi-Fi Sense.

Wi-Fi Sense privacy issues

You probably have a *lot* of people in your contact list, many of whom you would readily share your Wi-Fi password with, should they ever visit your home.

However, there are certainly just as many, if not more, that you don't want to share with – at least not without it being explicitly being requested of you.

And therein lies the issue with Wi-Fi Sense: it assumes all contacts are equal.

Wi-Fi Sense privacy leakage

If you disable Wi-Fi Sense, your contacts will not automatically gain access to your Wi-Fi network. Great.

However, you invite a friend over, and he asks you for your Wi-Fi password. You give it to him, and he connects successfully. So far, so good.

Except … *he* has Wi-Fi Sense enabled, and **Share network with my contacts** was checked when he connected[2]. All of *his* contacts now have potential access to your network.

Turn off Wi-Fi Sense

Press Windows + I to access **Settings;** in Settings, click on **Network & Internet**.

Then click on **Manage Wi-Fi settings.**

The resulting page will display an assortment of settings and information about Wi-Fi Sense.

Turn Wi-Fi Sense off by sliding *both* "Connect to suggested open hotspots" and "Connect to networks shared by my contacts" to the Off position. This action will:

- prevent you from automatically connecting to those "suggested" hotspots without your knowing about it
- prevent you from automatically connecting to your contacts wireless networks without you (or them) knowing about it
- prevent your contacts from automatically connecting to your network without needing to know the password

Note that Wi-Fi Sense seems to require signing in with a Microsoft account. When feasible, not doing so is another approach to avoiding Wi-Fi Sense, but ultimately it's more clear and less error-prone to actually turn the feature off.[3]