

UNC SRW Q&A

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Q: What is the UNC SRW?

A: The UNC SRW is the Secure Research Workspace (SRW) hosted by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's (UNC) Research Computing division. The UNC SRW provides a digital collaborative environment for teams of researchers to work with regulated data. The platform supports many projects working with a variety of data sensitivity levels and computational needs. The system adheres to a NIST 800-53 System Security Plan, often supporting DUA requirements. The user experience in the UNC SRW is via remote desktop to a virtual machine (VM) running Windows 10 Enterprise, using the VMWare Horizon View client on the user's local computer. Both the UNC SRW and the Horizon View client will be provided to Add Health restricted data researchers free of charge, as will most statistical software applications (e.g., SAS, Stata, R, MPlus, MatLab). (<https://its.unc.edu/research-computing/secure-research-workspace/>).

Q: Is there a fee involved?

A: No, there is no fee required to use the UNC SRW or the Horizon View client to connect to the UNC SRW. In addition, SAS, Stata, R, MPlus, and MatLab are also provided at no cost. There is a cost involved for each license needed for SPSS or HLM. See below for what to do if you need software not on the UNC SRW.

Q: What Operating System does the remote desktop run? Some of our users prefer Mac and others Windows, but none use Linux.

A: Currently, Windows 10 Enterprise is the default virtual desktop operating system. Windows 11 is a possible upgrade in the near future. Users with a Mac or Windows machine are able to remote into the virtual desktop at the UNC SRW using the Horizon View client, but once in, they will be working on a Windows 10/11 desktop platform.

Q: What software do researchers need to install on their Windows or Mac computers to access the UNC SRW? Are researchers able to use a web interface to login to the UNC SRW?

A: We are using the Horizon View client, and we are providing that client free of charge to the Add Health restricted data researchers. Currently, the Horizon View client is the only way to access the UNC SRW.

Q: Will the virtual machine desktops in the UNC SRW be powerful enough to run my data analysis?

A: The default VM has 4 processors and 16GB RAM. We also have a VM for power users who require more than 16GB RAM, which has 32GB RAM and 8 processors. Currently fewer than 3% of Add Health users in the UNC SRW need the higher-capacity VM.

Q: How much storage space does each user have on the UNC SRW?

A: We are not currently limiting the amount of storage each user may use. Because the storage devices use deduplication, our current footprint on the storage devices is at 4% of our current allocation. Having said that, let us know if you think your storage needs may be inordinately high.

Q: How many users can log into the UNC SRW at the same time?

A: There is currently no limit to the number of concurrent logins available on the UNC SRW. The UNC SRW infrastructure and Horizon View software to connect to the infrastructure will be increased as needed to accommodate researchers' needs.

Q: When trying to login to the SRW, I received the following error message: "Loading failed: All available desktop sources for this desktop are currently busy. Please try connecting to this desktop again later, or contact your system administrator." What should I do?

A: Send an email message to addhealth_contracts@unc.edu, and we will alert the UNC SRW systems administrator to either add additional desktops for our use, or remove stale connections to free-up desktop connections.

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A: Please note: if you are running statistical jobs that will run for hours/days and you don't want to remain on the UNC SRW, you may "disconnect" from the UNC SRW. This will allow your job to keep running. However, if you are not running jobs and you are finished for the day, be sure to logout, not simply disconnect, so your desktop VM will be freed up for another user!

Q: Does the UNC SRW usually reach its capacity limit between 9:00 AM and 5:00 PM during weekdays?

A: The current high-water mark for concurrent logins is well below our capacity. However, as we add more Add Health researchers to the UNC SRW, we do expect to see a higher utilization during normal business hours. Since researchers throughout the world are currently using the UNC SRW to analyze the Add Health data, "normal business hours" for you may be different than those of researchers in different time zones. Our plan is to keep the hardware at a level to support our researchers, no matter the time of day. However, in order to help us with this, we do ask that you logout, rather than simply disconnecting, when you are not using the UNC SRW and you are not running jobs that may take hours/days to run.

Q: We have many researchers on our contract who are using Add Health. Will you set up the virtual desktop for each of them?

A: Each researcher on the contract will receive a UNC ID and will be able to remote into a virtual desktop. Each desktop for your contract will have access to your shared data drive and each will have personal storage space for your analysis.

Q: What is the base software on the remote compute server include? Does the UNC SRW have statistical software like Stata, R and SAS?

A: Software on the UNC SRW is listed under section C of this link, and does include Stata, R, SAS, MatLab, and a 10-concurrent use license for MPlus (<https://help.rc.unc.edu/grant-information/>). Most any software you need that is not on the UNC SRW can be purchased (we will invoice each researcher individually and annually for each license needed) and installed by the UNC systems administrator. You can ask the Add Health contracts manager (addhealth_contracts@unc.edu) about any software you need that is not on this list.

A: UNC SRW Web page: <https://help.rc.unc.edu/grant-information/>
Section C shows available software (some software versions may be out of date on this website: we will install the latest versions of applications, but there may be a slight delay for testing before they are made available).

Q: Can I use the statistical software on my laptop to analyze the data on the SRW remote desktop?

A: No. You use your laptop to remote into the UNC SRW. All analysis is done on the UNC SRW virtual desktop.

Q: Can researchers request administrative rights to install software packages to UNC's SRW? Includes R Studio and extensions (open-source).

A: No, but the UNC SRW systems administrator is happy to install software applications for which researchers purchase valid licenses (see below for how to do this), and the Add Health systems administrator has permission to install updates to software, such as R Studio and Stata DO files. Just let us know what you need and we'll help facilitate the installation/update of the software.

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Q: If I cannot install my own software, is there a way for us to purchase additional licenses through UNC to install for the research group? This software includes, but is not limited to, SPSS, HLM, Stat Transfer, and NVivo.

A: Yes. You will request your special software from us, and we will let you know if the software vendor allows us to install their application in our virtual environment. If your requested software is available to be installed on the SRW, we will invoice each researcher individually and annually for each license needed. Once we receive payment, we will purchase the license on your behalf (we have to maintain chain-of-custody in order to pass an audit by the software vendors) and give the requesting-researcher access to the software in the SRW. Note the software that is already available on the SRW (section C of this link: <https://help.rc.unc.edu/grant-information/>)

Q: Can I download my command and output files to my computer?

A: No. When you need statistical summaries or copies of your statistical code, you should send an email request to addhealth_contracts@unc.edu and give specific file locations for what you need. An Add Health staff member will fulfill your request within two business days, so you will need to plan ahead.

Q: Can command, log, and data files be copied between different SRW folders?

A: The original data files should not be copied out of their original folder. You may share your interim data sets, as well as command and log files, with others on your research team, but that is best done by having a shared working directory, rather than by copying the files to other directories. Each contract will have a work directory set up where researchers will each have a directory for their work, as well as a shared directory to share files with co-workers.

Q: Once we commit to switching to the UNC SRW, we cannot keep our local, previously approved, system anymore. Is that correct?

A: This is correct. Each contract is allowed the use of one copy of the data. You will need to securely erase the data from your environment once you are set up to use the UNC SRW. We will work with you so that the transition to the UNC SRW will not negatively impact your research.

Q: Are support services available to UNC's SRW end-users and what types of services are provided?

A: Add Health staff will give you documentation for installing the Horizon View client, as well as helping you get your UNC account set up and ready to use in the UNC SRW.

A: We recommend each contract includes a technically savvy systems administrator to learn and help researchers on the contract how to do things like install the Horizon View client on your local computer, help you login and navigate the system, and help you change your password annually. If your systems administrator needs help learning these tasks, or if you don't have a systems administrator, send an email to addhealth_contracts@unc.edu, and one of the Add Health staff members will reach out to help answer your questions.

A: Users could call the UNC Help Desk for help with logging in and password changes. However, our preference, to limit the load on the Help Desk from non-UNC researchers, is that each contract provide a technically savvy systems administrator to learn these tasks and to be the tier one helpdesk for your questions. That will add a layer to getting answers to your questions, but in the long run will allow us to continue providing this resource for free.

Q: In a prior email, you wrote regarding Wave V, "...please note that we are not approving current users on a file server, as a general rule, to work remotely." Do we interpret this to mean that when Wave VI is released the remote compute server that we host will not be supported?

A: Yes. Our current goal is to transition off of all researchers' systems by the time we release Wave VI data in 2025, and use the UNC SRW as the primary compute platform for the Add Health data.

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Q: Do researchers seem to like the UNC SRW, or are there limitations that frustrate users?

A: We are trying to remove all possible roadblocks to utilizing the UNC SRW for our Add Health researchers. If you encounter anything in your experience that frustrates you, please email us so we can try to fix the problem! In the meantime, it is our understanding that our researchers are happy with their experience using the UNC SRW. Below are just a couple of comments we've received to date:

- "... it has been wonderful to use -- easy, intuitive, and reliable. I am so glad you helped us set up this option."
- "Everyone on the team has been very responsive! [The staff member who sends my summary statistics] is great. She sends the output very quickly. Very communicative...There has been a level of collegiality that is unparalleled. Everyone on the UNC team has been great. Excited to be part of the SRW!"