

receive_generation field in KeyUpdate

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Background

“The KeyUpdate handshake message is used to indicate that the sender is updating its sending cryptographic keys.”

“Upon receiving a KeyUpdate, the receiver **MUST** update their receiving keys and if they have not already updated their sending state up to or past the then current receiving generation **MUST** send their own KeyUpdate prior to sending any other messages. This mechanism allows either side to force an update to the entire connection.”

Effect of KeyUpdate

KeyUpdate is an instruction to the other side:

“ratchet your receive key forwards and delete the old key.”

“Also, if you haven’t already updated your send key to the same generation, do that and send me back a KeyUpdate.”

Current KeyUpdate message

```
struct {} KeyUpdate;
```

Proposed KeyUpdate message

```
struct {  
    uint64 receive_generation;  
} KeyUpdate;
```

Proposed explanatory text

`receive_generation`

: The generation of the receive traffic keys in use by the sender of the `KeyUpdate` message. This value equals the number of `KeyUpdate` messages that the sender has received.

An endpoint *MAY* use the `receive_generation` field in a received `KeyUpdate` message to confirm that the other side has received and acted upon an earlier `KeyUpdate` message.

Same semantics as before

- Still just as asynchronous.
- Still no blocking.
- Endpoints already have to maintain the traffic-key generations.
- On receipt, no obligation to do anything.
- Many endpoints will probably ignore the field.

Okay, but why?

Q: In what cases does an endpoint want this?

A: If the endpoint wants to know **when** the other side has ratcheted its receive key.

Example use cases

- Embedded devices may want to avoid going to sleep until keys have been ratcheted forwards.
- If paranoid, at end of TLS connection, make sure traffic keys are dead: Send `KeyUpdate` and wait for incremented `receive_generation`.
- Endpoints can permit read-only auditor without MITM by releasing only superseded traffic keys.

Conclusion

KeyUpdate is an instruction to the other side:
“ratchet your receive key forwards and delete the old key.”

Adding this field gives confirmation that instruction has been carried out.

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