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Installing or upgrading Node.js on a VPS: distro package, NodeSource or nvm

Node.js, Python & Docker

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Installing or upgrading Node.js on a VPS: distro package, NodeSource or nvm

Node.js, Python & Docker Created on **October 10, 2026** 3 min read



You installed Node.js on a VPS and the version is too old for your project, or you need to move up. **The short answer:** there are three routes, and the choice depends on how many projects you have and who runs them. For a server with one application, the NodeSource repository is the most direct. For several projects on different versions, `nvm`. The distribution's package is the simplest, but it tends to be behind.

The three routes

Method	Good for	The catch
Distribution package (`apt` , `dnf`)	Installing quickly, with the system's security updates.	The version is often older than the one the project asks for. On AlmaLinux and Rocky the distribution offers module streams (`dnf module list nodejs`).
NodeSource repository	A recent, fixed version for the whole system; updates come through `apt` or `dnf` .	Follow the command on their page, which changes with versions; do not copy it from an old tutorial.
`nvm` (Node Version Manager)	Several projects on different versions, or trying a new version without touching the old one.	It installs per user, not for the system. systemd and PM2 do not load nvm: use the full path to `node` .

Choosing the version and confirming

1. **See what the project asks for:** the `engines` field in `package.json` , or the README. Prefer a *long-term support* (LTS) version: under Node.js's policy, the even-numbered releases are the ones that become LTS; end-of-support dates are on nodejs.org.

2 **Install by the chosen method,** following the project's current documentation (NodeSource or nvm). The instructions change over time, so this article does not copy them. With nvm, after installing:

```
nvm install 22
nvm use 22
nvm alias default 22
```

The 22 is an example: use the version you need.

3 **Confirm:**

```
node -v
npm -v
which node
```

`which node` shows which one is being used. If the version is not what you expected, another installation is ahead in the path.

4 **After moving up a version,** reinstall each project's dependencies (`npm ci`) and rebuild the ones with compiled parts (`npm rebuild`), then restart the applications (`pm2 restart` , or the service).

Is the service still on the old Node?

It is the commonest slip with nvm: your terminal uses the new version, but systemd (or PM2 started by another user) does not load nvm and runs whatever it finds. Put in `ExecStart` the full path that `which node` gave you with nvm active. See **the service example with variables**.

Do not skip versions blindly.

Go up one step at a time, test the application and only then move on. Before touching a server that hosts sites, make a backup: **backing up a VPS**. On an unmanaged VPS, Node and whatever runs on it are yours to maintain: **how far our support goes**.

RECOMMENDED

No VPS for your application yet? See the plans and pick the system when you order.

See the VPS servers →

SEE ALSO

Keeping a Node.js app running on a VPS with PM2 →

Node.js in cPanel: choosing the version and using npm

Which operating system to choose for your VPS or server

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