Australia bans social media for under 16s

Australia just voted into law a social media ban for children under the age of 16. The legislation was approved by Australian lawmakers on Thursday with the aim of protecting the mental health of children online, despite opposition from tech companies who claim the rules are unworkable.

The new law is scheduled to come into effect in 12 months, giving social media companies time to meet the requirements. These include taking “reasonable steps to prevent children who have not reached a minimum age from having accounts.” Children who violate these upcoming restrictions won’t face punishment, nor will their parents — the responsibility lies entirely with platform providers.

“We want Australian children to have a childhood, and we want parents to know the Government is in their corner,” Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said in a statement earlier this month. “We know some kids will find workarounds, but we’re sending a message to social media companies to clean up their act.”

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While specific platforms haven’t been named in the law, the rules are expected to apply to the likes of Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok, per the Prime Minister. Sites used for education, including YouTube, would be exempt, as are messaging apps like WhatsApp.

The legislation doesn’t specify how tech companies will

enforce the new age restrictions, but those that fail to do so would face fines of up to $50 million AUS (about $32.4 million US). The law does not require users to upload government IDs as part of the verification process.

Meta criticized the bill when it was introduced in the Australian parliament last week, calling it “inconsistent and ineffective.” The company urged the Australian government to delay passing the legislation, citing “uncertainty surrounding the ‘reasonable steps’ that need to be taken” for impacted platforms to enforce it. X owner Elon Musk has also slammed the law, alleging that it seems like “a backdoor way to control access to the Internet by all Australians.”

https://www.theverge.com/2024/11/28/24308245/australia-bans-social-media-children-under-16