

Australia Defends Child Safety Ban as Global Reactions Grow



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Australia's sweeping ban on social media access for children under 16 has expanded to include nearly all major platforms, from Meta's apps to YouTube, X, TikTok, Snapchat, Reddit, Kick and Twitch. The government says the move is necessary to shield young people from online harm, though critics warn it may isolate vulnerable groups and push children toward less-regulated

digital spaces.

Communications Minister Anika Wells acknowledged on Wednesday that early implementation may bring “teething problems,” but stressed the urgency of protecting Generation Alpha – Australians under 15 – from what she described as the manipulative and addictive mechanics behind social media engagement. She cited warnings from tech insiders who likened recommendation algorithms to “behavioural cocaine,” saying children today face a constant “dopamine drip” from the moment they receive a smartphone.

Wells said authorities are monitoring emerging apps like Lemon8 and Yope to determine whether young users are shifting to alternative platforms. Australia’s eSafety Commissioner recently contacted both companies to self-assess their status under the new law. Yope’s CEO Bahram Ismailau said the platform functions as a private messenger service rather than a social media outlet and has no public content. Lemon8, meanwhile, has reportedly agreed to block under-16 users starting next week.

YouTube – initially exempt but later included – criticised the legislation as “rushed,” arguing that removing youth accounts could reduce safety by eliminating built-in parental controls.

The legislation, the first of its kind worldwide, is drawing close attention from global policymakers. A government-commissioned study earlier this year found that 96% of Australians

aged 10–15 used social media, with high exposure to harmful content including misogyny, violence, self-harm material and eating-disorder promotion. One in seven reported grooming attempts, while more than half had experienced cyberbullying.