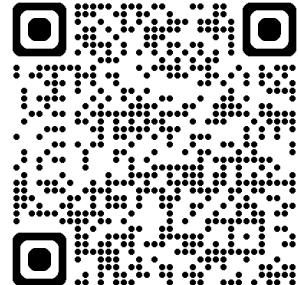


Can Australia's social media ban actually protect kids?



<https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/videos/20251210154654932/>

An Australian ban on social media use by anybody under age 16 took effect on Wednesday, the world's first limitation of its kind. A law enacted last year limits use of 10 social media platforms amid growing calls for regulations. These came after a series of cases of bullying or sexual abuse through social media. Australia is the world's first nation to introduce a sweeping ban on that age group. The 10 platforms are Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Threads, Tik-Tok, Twitch, X, YouTube, Kick, and Reddit. Under the new law, they have to take steps to prevent users under age 16 from keeping or creating an account. The companies face fines of up to 49.5 million Australian dollars or roughly 32.7 million US dollars in case of noncompliance. No penalties are set for affected children and their parents or caretakers. Some parents support the measure as protection of children against harmful content, but many online posts have been made introducing ways to bypass the ban. Under the new law, age verification is left to the platforms, but questions remain about whether it is possible to precisely confirm this. NHK World's Jennifer Walpole has been covering the story. She joins us from Sydney. Jennifer, how are Australians, especially children, reacting to the new law?

Well, opinions are divided. In particular, between adults and children. This morning, I spoke to a 14-year-old named McKayla who to her dismay had her Tik-Tok account blocked. She told me she was a little bit sad today because all of her Tik-Toks over the year are now gone and some of her friends also lost their accounts. Her mother, on the other hand, described the ban as a wake-up call for parents and said it shed light on the dangers of kids' social media use. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has been vocal about why his government introduced the ban. He spoke to NHK this morning.

Because this is a global issue. Young people around the world, including Japan, are suffering increased mental health issues. There is increased social dislocation. Social media can cause social harm.

The Australian government seems to be working under a sense of crisis given all the cases of bullying and abuse we've seen over the years as you talked about a few minutes ago. Officials have really taken a hard stance that children are suffering because of social media and it's not to be tolerated.

This idea is spreading to other places, and it seems to be popular among some adults, but what's the trick to making sure the ban protects children?

The world is watching Australia closely right now. Countries such as Malaysia and Denmark, as well as several states in the US, are moving forward with bans to social media. The biggest challenge is how to effectively implement the ban and so far there have been some hiccups. For instance, while McKayla had her Tik-Tok account banned, her other accounts are still active. McKayla herself called the rollout disorganized, and she even told me she was confident that she and her friends could get around the ban. With that said, the government has ordered social media companies to report their user numbers every month so they can measure how effective the ban is. It's clear that lawmakers here have their work cut out for them, but it seems that officials are taking that work seriously because of how severe the consequences of social media use can be. Governments now have to balance protecting children and freedom of communication and figure out a way to engage children on this issue.

Now discuss the questions with a partner.

1. Do you think the ban will have an effect? Why or why not?
2. Why do you think Japan hasn't imposed a similar ban?
3. How would you feel if you suddenly lost access to your social media account?
4. What "hiccups" do you think the Australian government has faced?
5. Do you feel anything else should or shouldn't have age restrictions?