



By: TA | AP Brief

Meta alerts young Australians to download their data before a social media ban



Technology giant Meta began sending thousands of young Australians a two-week warning to downland their digital histories and delete their accounts from Facebook, Instagram and Threads before a world-first **social media ban** on accounts of children younger than 16 takes effect.

The **Australian government** announced two weeks ago that the three Meta platforms plus Snapchat, TikTok, X and YouTube must take reasonable steps to exclude Australian account holders younger than 16, beginning Dec. 10.

California-based Meta became the first of the targeted tech companies to outline how it will comply with the law.

Meta contacted thousands of young account holders via SMS and email to warn that suspected children will start to be denied access to the platforms from Dec. 4.

“We will start notifying impacted teens today to give them the opportunity to save their contacts and memories,” Meta said in a statement.

Meta said young users could also use the notice period to update their contact information “so we can get in touch and help them regain access once they turn 16.”

Meta has estimated there are 350,000 Australians aged 13-to-15 on Instagram and 150,000 in that age bracket on Facebook. Australia’s population is 28 million.

Account holders 16-years-old and older who were mistakenly given notice that they would be excluded can contact Yoti Age Verification and verify their age by providing government-issued identity documents or a “video selfie,” Meta said.

Terry Flew, co-director of Sydney University’s Center for AI, Trust and Governance, said such facial-recognition technology had a failure rate of at least 5%.

“In the absence of a government-mandated ID system, we’re always looking at second-best

solutions around these things,” Flew told the Australian Broadcasting Corp.

A better approach is required

The government has warned platforms that demanding that all account holders prove they are older than 15 would be an unreasonable response to the new **age restrictions**.

The government maintains the platforms already had **sufficient data** about many account holders to ascertain they were not young children.

Failure to take reasonable steps to exclude young children could earn platforms fines of up to 50 million Australian dollars (\$32 million).

Meta’s vice president and global head of safety, Antigone Davis, said she would prefer that app stores including Apple App Store and Google Play collect the age information when a user signs up and verifies they are at least 16 year old for app operators such as Facebook and Instagram.

Parents should start helping their children plan on how they will spend the hours currently absorbed by social media - Dany Elachi

“We believe a better approach is required: a standard, more accurate, and privacy-preserving system, such as OS/app store-level age verification,” Davis said in a statement.

“This combined with our investments in ongoing efforts to assure age ... offers a more comprehensive protection for young people online,” she added.

Dany Elachi, founder of the parents’ group Heaps Up Alliance that lobbied for the **social media age restriction**, said parents should start helping their children plan on how they will spend the hours currently absorbed by social media.

He was critical of the government's only announcing on the complete list of platforms that will become age-restricted on Nov. 5.

"There are aspects of the legislation that we're not entirely supportive of, but the principle that children under the age of 16 are better off in the real world, that's something we advocated for and are in favor of," Elachi said.

"When everybody misses out, nobody misses out. That's the theory. Certainly we expect that it would play out that way. We hope parents are going to be very positive about this and try to help their children see all the potential possibilities that are now open to them," he added.