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## Australia to Enforce Under-16 Social Media Ban with New Age Verification Measures

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Starting 10 December 2025, Australians under the age of 16 will be restricted from accessing major social media platforms under new legislation introduced by the federal government. The initiative is aimed at limiting exposure to potentially harmful online content and interactions among minors. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, and X (formerly Twitter) will be required to implement age verification systems to comply with the rules or face steep financial penalties.

Under the new law, social media services defined as “age-restricted social media platforms” must have a significant purpose of enabling user interaction and allowing the posting of content. Although the law does not explicitly list every platform covered, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese confirmed the inclusion of mainstream platforms like Facebook and YouTube. The legislation compels these companies to take “reasonable steps” to deactivate underage accounts, block new registrations by users under 16, and prevent workarounds that bypass these measures.

The Communications Minister, Anika Wells, clarified that exemptions would apply to platforms whose main functions are messaging, video or voice calling, education, professional networking, healthcare communication, or online gaming. Services such as LinkedIn, WhatsApp, Roblox, and Coursera are expected to be exempt if they meet the specified criteria, though final determinations will be made by the eSafety Commissioner.

To verify users’ ages, platforms will be allowed flexibility in how they implement verification. Although photo ID checks are one option, they cannot be the only method. Alternatives under consideration include facial age estimation technology, uploading a photo to be matched with official ID, and verification through banks or mobile service providers. Artificial intelligence (AI) may also be used to infer age based on account behavior or registration dates. For example, if a user signed up to a platform more than a decade ago, it would reasonably suggest they are over 16.

While the government acknowledges that determined teenagers may attempt to bypass the restrictions, similar to how some underage users access alcohol, Prime Minister Albanese defended the policy as a necessary step. He compared the social media restrictions to existing age-based laws, saying, “It’s not going to be easy, but it’s worth it.”

The rise of virtual private networks (VPNs) in countries with similar laws, such as the United Kingdom’s pornography site age verification scheme, raises questions about enforcement. In the UK, several VPN apps surged in popularity following the rollout, indicating that some users may attempt similar tactics in Australia.

Should platforms fail to implement adequate safeguards, they may face penalties of up to AUD \$49.5 million, with the amount to be decided by the federal court. What constitutes “reasonable steps” will be judged by the eSafety Commissioner, with the government stressing these rules are “set-and-support,” not “set-and-forget,” meaning adjustments may be made as the policy evolves.

The federal government's move marks a significant shift in how digital platforms are regulated in Australia. While the focus remains on protecting children, the long-term implications for user privacy, platform compliance, and enforcement logistics will be closely watched.