

## criticism on day one

As Australian teenagers lose access to social media, observers say there are still many unknown questions about the ban, which came into force on 10 December

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### ▲ Instagram has warned under 16s that their accounts will be closed

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Australia's unprecedented ban on social media for under 16s has finally come into force, but day one of the new law has revealed some teething problems, including the fact that some children have managed to outsmart age-verification technology designed to keep them from accessing their accounts.

The policy has been met with support from many parents, who hope it will lead to less online bullying, more time outdoors and less exposure to inappropriate content. In other quarters, [there has been criticism](#) [/article/2507241-how-australian-teens-are-planning-to-get-around-their-social-media-ban/](#) that the ban will be ineffective and counterproductive, along with [countless satirical memes](#) <https://www.betootaadvocate.com/family-begin-covert-operation-to-change-pops-age-to-15-on-facebook/>.

should be part of the ban, but haven't yet lost access to their accounts. "There's definitely folks that have said that they've got around it or not been prompted yet," says Hammond, though he expects more accounts to be closed over the next week.

Meta, the owner of two of the biggest social media platforms subject to the ban, Instagram and Facebook, told *New Scientist* today that it began removing access to accounts about a week ago. "As of today, we have removed all accounts that we understand to be under 16," says a Meta spokesperson. "As Australia's social media ban takes effect, Meta has removed access to Instagram, Threads, and Facebook for teens who we understand to be under 16, and will prevent new users under 16 from creating accounts."

Meta declined to provide specific details of the number of accounts removed, though the spokesperson pointed to data published earlier in the year that there are around 150,000 13- to 15-year-olds in Australia who are on Facebook and about 350,000 on Instagram. This implies that, just on those two platforms, the accounts of at least half a million young Australians have now been deleted.

The company says it is committed to meeting its legal obligations, but that even on day one of the ban many of the concerns raised by community groups and some parents are coming to fruition. "These include isolating vulnerable teens from getting support from online communities, driving teens to less regulated apps and parts of the internet, inconsistent age verification methods, and little interest in compliance from many teens and parents," says the spokesperson.

Hammond says there are still plenty of unanswered questions, like the details of what will happen to teenagers under 16 who are holidaying or studying in Australia. [The government has already said](https://www.esafety.gov.au/young-people/social-media-age-restrictions#:~:text=What%20will%20happen%20to%20my,as%20soon%20as%20you%20can.) <https://www.esafety.gov.au/young-people/social-media-age-restrictions#:~:text=What%20will%20happen%20to%20my,as%20soon%20as%20you%20can.> the law will apply to teenagers who are visiting. While Australians are having their accounts deleted, Hammond says it is likely that visitors will simply see their accounts suspended. "But we're only hours into the ban, so I think there's still a lot of water to flow under the bridge in terms of how it's going to work."

As the law comes fully into force, Hammond, Australia and the rest of the world are watching to see what happens next. "Now, we'll see what the actual reality of how dedicated the under 16s are to their social media," he says. Perhaps "they'll be out, kicking balls and playing cricket in the street", says Hammond, "but if it really is embedded in their lives, then we'll start to see lots of circumvention attempts."