

Kids Off Social Media Act

Bill Summary

To address the harms that social media is having on children, the bill would:

- Prohibit children under the age of 13 from creating or maintaining social media accounts, consistent with the current practices of major social media companies;
- Prohibit social media companies from recommending content using algorithms to users under the age of 17;
- Provide the FTC and state attorneys general authority to enforce the provisions of the above provisions; and
- Track existing CIPA framework to require schools to ban social media on their networks.

Teen Mental Health Crisis

Our country is facing a mental health crisis and no group is affected more than adolescents—especially young girls. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s [Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#) found that 57 percent of high school girls and 29 percent of high school boys felt persistently sad or hopeless in 2021, with 22 percent of all high school students—and nearly a third of high school girls—reporting they had seriously considered attempting suicide in the preceding year.

Social Media’s Role

Social media companies have [known](#) about the link between poor mental health and their products for years. According to internal Meta documents:

- “Thirty-two percent of teen girls said that when they felt bad about their bodies, Instagram made them feel worse.”
- “Teens blame Instagram for increases in the rate of anxiety and depression. This reaction was unprompted and consistent across all groups.”

[Independent research](#) has confirmed these findings and shows that social media usage is a cause for the mental health epidemic. Repeated studies show that the more children and teens use social media, the higher the risk of depression.¹ Repeated randomized controlled trials show that when children and teens reduce or eliminate exposure to social media for longer than a month, their mental health benefits.² And no other cause plausibly explains the giant and international spike in teen, and particularly teen girl, depression and poor mental health starting around 2012—the first time that the majority of Americans owned a smartphone and the year Facebook bought Instagram and its user base exploded.³ Many Silicon Valley parents have long known about these risks, and that is why they have often [banned their own children](#) from using the technology.

¹ See, e.g., Surgeon General Advisory (“A longitudinal cohort study of U.S. adolescents aged 12–15 (n=6,595) that adjusted for baseline mental health status found that adolescents who spent more than 3 hours per day on social media faced double the risk of experiencing poor mental health outcomes including symptoms of depression and anxiety”); Jonathan Haidt, [Social Media is a Major Cause of the Mental Illness Epidemic in Teen Girls. Here’s the Evidence](#). §3.

² See, e.g., Surgeon General Advisory (“Limits on the use of social media have resulted in mental health benefits for young adults and adults.”); Haidt §§4-5 (“[T]here are now many true experiments using a variety of methods to test questions such as whether reducing or eliminating exposure to social media confers benefits (it does, when continued for at least a month.”).

³ See generally, The Ezra Klein Show, [Why are Teens in Crisis? Here’s What the Evidence Says](#); Haidt §7.

Surgeon General’s Advisory

In a call to action, the U.S. Surgeon General issued an [advisory](#) in May 2023 warning about the effect of social media on youth mental health and explaining that “[a]t this time, we do not yet have enough evidence to determine if social media is sufficiently safe for children and adolescents.” The Surgeon General explains the evidence about social media “necessitates significant concern with the way it is currently designed, deployed, and utilized” and that “now is the time to act swiftly and decisively to protect children and adolescents from risk of harm.” While the [minimum age](#) on nearly every social media platform—TikTok, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube, Snapchat, Facebook, and more—is 13 years old, nearly 40% of children ages 8–12 use social media.⁴ Accordingly, the Surgeon General called on policymakers to strengthen and enforce age minimums for social media, and highlighted the importance of limiting the use of features, like algorithms, that attempt to maximize time, attention, and engagement.

Overwhelming Support from Parents

A survey conducted by [Count on Mothers](#) shows that over 90% of mothers agree that there should be a minimum age of 13 for social media. Also, 87% of mothers agree that social media companies should not be allowed to use personalized recommendation systems to deliver content to children. Pew finds similar general levels of concern from parents, [reporting](#) that 70% or more of parents worry that their teens are being exposed to explicit content or wasting too much time on social media, with two-thirds of parents saying parenting is [harder today](#) compared to 20 years ago, with many citing social media.

Contact

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⁴ Similarly, the UK regulator conducted a study and [reports](#) that nearly 80 percent of 12 year olds there have social media accounts.