

Dutch to allow euthanasia for under-12s

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The Dutch government on Friday gave euthanasia for children under 12 the green light, permitting mercy deaths for young minors suffering "unbearably and without hope".

Children over 12 can already ask for [euthanasia](#), with mandatory parental consent until they reach 16. It is also legal for babies under a year old, also with parental permission.

The cabinet's new decision comes after years of requests by Dutch doctors asking that the current age limit of 12 and older for euthanasia to be brought down.

The rule change requires the government to modify an existing protocol, without the need for parliamentary approval.

"The cabinet is working on a life termination scheme for [children](#) up to the age of 12 who suffer unbearably and without hope," the Health Ministry said.

On annual basis this will be applicable to "a small group of about five to 10 children... whose palliative care options are not sufficient to relieve suffering and who are expected to die within the foreseeable future," it said in a statement.

The new changes for children between one and 12 will bring the Netherlands in line with Belgium, which in 2014 became the first country in the world to pass a law allowing euthanasia for [young children](#)

—but with the child's consent.

The Dutch protocol however says that if the child is unable to give consent, euthanasia could also be carried out with the parents' permission in consultation with a doctor, Health ministry spokesman Axel Dees told AFP.

The new ruling comes after years of debate and had faced opposition even from two Christian parties within Prime Minister Mark Rutte's own ruling coalition.

"This is a very complex subject that deals with harrowing situations that you would not wish on anyone," Health Minister Ernst Kuipers said.

"I am pleased that after intensive consultation with all parties involved, we have come to a solution with which we can help these terminally-ill children, their parents and also their practitioners," Kuipers said.

The Netherlands and neighboring Belgium became the first countries in the world to legalize euthanasia in 2002.

More than 8,700 people were euthanised in the Netherlands in 2022 according to government figures. The majority of those were suffering from incurable cancer.

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