

US top health official sounds alarm on child social media use

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America's top health official said there is growing evidence that social media use is associated with harm to young people's mental health.

The top US health official on Tuesday issued a stark warning to parents,

tech companies and regulators, saying the evidence is growing that social media use may seriously harm children.

In a lengthy advisory, US surgeon general Vivek Murthy said that while not without benefits, "there are ample indicators that social media can also have a profound risk of harm to the mental health and well-being of children and adolescents."

Social media use by [young people](#) in the United States is nearly universal, with up to 95 percent of adolescents reporting using a social platform and more than a third saying they do so "almost constantly," according to the Department of Health and Human Services.

Murthy's report said social media can help children and adolescents find a community to connect, but that it also contains "extreme, inappropriate, and harmful content," which can "normalize" self-harm and suicide.

It can perpetuate body dissatisfaction, eating disorders and depression and expose children to online bullying while they are undergoing a critical stage in brain development, the report warned.

Murthy called on policymakers to strengthen safety standards around social media and urged [tech companies](#) to responsibly assess the impact of their products on children and share data with researchers.

He also advised parents to establish tech-free zones at home in order to promote in-person communication, and to educate children by modelling healthy, responsible online behavior.

The report comes at a time when authorities across the United States are searching for ways to regulate [social media use](#), and curb its ill-effects on young people in particular.

Earlier this month, the US state of Montana banned the use of TikTok on its territory. The Chinese-owned video sharing giant is challenging the decision in court. And in March, Utah became the first US state to require [social media sites](#) to get parental consent for accounts used by minors.

"We are in the middle of a national youth mental health crisis, and I am concerned that [social media](#) is an important driver of that crisis—one that we must urgently address," Murthy said.

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