

# Press release: Gove takes action to ban plastic straws, stirrers, and cotton buds



**The government confirms a ban on plastic straws, stirrers, and cotton buds to slash plastic waste**

Environment Secretary Michael Gove has today confirmed a ban on plastic straws, drinks stirrers, and plastic stemmed cotton buds in England, following overwhelming public support for the move.

Following an open consultation, a ban on the supply of plastic straws, drinks stirrers and cotton buds will come into force in April 2020. The ban will include exemptions to ensure that those with medical needs or a disability are able to continue to access plastic straws.

The [government's response](#) to the consultation published today (22 May) reveals over 80% of respondents back a ban on the distribution and sale of plastic straws, 90% a ban on drinks stirrers, and 89% a ban on cotton buds.

There are instances where using plastic straws is necessary for medical reasons and the government will therefore ensure that those that need to use plastic straws for medical reasons can still access them. Registered pharmacies will be allowed to sell plastic straws over the counter or online. Catering establishments such as restaurants, pubs and bars will not be able to display plastic straws or automatically hand them out, but they will be able to provide them on request. The government believes this strikes the right balance between reducing environmental impact while protecting the rights of people with medical conditions and disabilities. The government will carry out a stocktake after one year to assess the impact of these measures and whether the balance is correct.

[In England, it is estimated that annually we use](#) 4.7 billion plastic straws, 316 million plastic stirrers and 1.8 billion plastic-stemmed cotton buds. An

[estimated 10% of cotton buds are flushed down toilets](#) and can end up in waterways and oceans.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

Urgent and decisive action is needed to tackle plastic pollution and protect our environment. These items are often used for just a few minutes but take hundreds of years to break down, ending up in our seas and oceans and harming precious marine life.

So today I am taking action to turn the tide on plastic pollution, and ensure we leave our environment in a better state for future generations.

Even though non-plastic alternatives are readily available, [it is estimated that 95% of straws are still plastic](#). Cleaning up the effects of littering costs local government millions of pounds every year, with costs also imposed on the tourism and fishing industries, and the effect of plastic pollution worrying 89% of people.

It is estimated there are over [150 million tonnes of plastic in the world's oceans](#) and every year one million birds and [over 100,000 sea mammals die from eating and getting tangled in plastic waste](#). A [recent report estimates that plastic in the sea is set to treble by 2025](#).

An exemption will also be in place to allow the use of plastic-stemmed cotton buds for medical and scientific purposes, where these are often the only practical option.

Today's announcement follows the success of the [government's world-leading ban on microbeads](#) and [5p charge on single-use plastic bags, which has seen distribution by major supermarkets drop by 86%](#).

Hugo Tagholm, CEO, Surfers Against Sewage said:

Surfers Against Sewage welcome the ban on plastic straws, stirrers and cotton buds. Stopping the production and distribution of these single-use plastic menaces will prevent them from polluting beaches nationwide. It's a really positive and bold step in the right direction in the battle against plastic pollution.

It also helps further drive plastic-free options and alternatives for the public so they can truly make more sustainable choices in their daily lives.

Lauren West, Trailblazers Manager at Muscular Dystrophy UK, said:

Plastic straws are sometimes the only type of straw that work for disabled people due to their flexibility and ability to be used in

hot and cold drinks. While we appreciate the need to reduce the use of plastics, traditional single-use straws are essential for some disabled people.

If disabled people cannot access plastic straws when out it could put their health at risk as they may not be able to drink and could become dehydrated. We're pleased the Government has recognised this in its proposals put forward today. We would encourage Defra to continue consulting disabled people and groups like Trailblazers to ensure we are not disadvantaged or targeted and stigmatised for using single-use plastics.

The government has recently announced a range of measures to eliminate all avoidable plastic waste underpinned by its [recently published landmark Resources and Waste Strategy](#). Other recent [key government actions include a world-leading ban on microbeads, taking over 15 billion plastic bags out of circulation](#) with our 5p plastic bag charge and plans to extend it to all retailers, and [consulting on introducing a deposit return scheme](#) to drive-up the recycling of drinks bottles and cans.

The [UK government has also committed a £61.4 million package of funding](#) to boost global research and help countries across the Commonwealth stop plastic waste from entering the oceans. Building on this, [the government's £20 million Plastics Research and Innovation Fund encourages researchers and businesses to develop new innovations](#) that can bring changes in the UK's plastics manufacturing and consumption patterns, which will be key to developing a cleaner, greener economy through the [Industrial Strategy](#).

Earlier this year, the government [launched a consultation on a world-leading tax on plastic packaging](#) which does not contain a minimum of 30% recycled content from April 2022.

### **Further information:**

- [Single-use plastics can be defined](#) as all products that are made wholly or partly of plastic and are typically intended to be used just once and/or for a short period of time before being disposed of.
- The government will ban the supply of plastic stirrers.
- The government will ban the supply of plastic stemmed cotton buds, with an exemption for scientific uses. This will cover use in medical practice, scientific research and forensic purposes to support criminal investigations.
- The figure that it is estimated there are over 150 million tonnes of plastic in the world's oceans is from: ['Plastics, the environment and human health: current consensus and future trends'](#). 2009, Thompson, R.C., et al.
- The figure that every year one million birds and over 100,000 sea mammals die is from: ['Economic Impacts of Marine Litter'](#), 2010, Mouat et al.
- [The figure that plastic in the sea is set to treble is taken from the Future of the Sea report](#), 2018.

- The figure of the effect of plastic pollution worrying 89% of people is from Populus: Ocean Plastic Survey.