

Legislation to ban plastic straws, stirrers and cotton buds enters Parliament

The legislation to ban the supply of plastic straws, stirrers and cotton buds will be laid in Parliament today (Tuesday, 3 March), marking an important step in the Government's fight against single-use plastics.

[In England, it is estimated that we use](#) 4.7 billion plastic straws, 316 million plastic stirrers and 1.8 billion plastic-stemmed cotton buds every year. [An estimated 10% of cotton buds are flushed down toilets](#) and can end up in waterways and oceans and threaten precious marine wildlife.

Following a public consultation in Autumn 2018 which saw huge support, the Government [confirmed in May 2019](#) that it would implement a ban with exceptions to ensure that those with medical needs or a disability are able to access plastic straws.

In a bid to strike the right balance between reducing environmental impact while protecting the rights of people with medical conditions and disabilities, 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, automatically hand them out, or offer them – however, these establishments will be able to provide them on request.

The Government will carry out a stocktake after one year to assess the impact of these measures and whether the balance is correct.

Environment Minister Rebecca Pow said:

We must turn the tide on the widespread use of single-use plastics and the threat they pose to our natural environments. Our ban on plastic straws, stirrers and cotton buds is yet another measure to clamp down on unnecessary plastic so we can better protect our precious wildlife and leave our environment in a better state for future generations.

This ban strikes the right balance, ensuring that we accommodate those with medical needs or disabilities while also protecting the environment.

The ban on straws, stirrers and cotton buds is just one of a range of measures to eliminate all avoidable plastic waste, underpinned by the Government's [landmark Resources and Waste Strategy](#). Other key government actions include a [world-leading ban on microbeads](#), introducing a [5p charge on plastic bags in major supermarkets which has reduced usage by 90%](#), and

consulting on [introducing a deposit return scheme](#) to drive-up the recycling of drinks containers.

More information

- The Statutory Instrument will be laid in Parliament, entitled: Environmental Protection (Plastic Straws, Cotton buds and Stirrers) (England) Regulations 2020. It will be debated and approved by Parliament in the usual way
- [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 investigation