

Cotton buds with plastic stems

Enforcement begins 1 September 2023

What is proposed to be banned and when?



The sale and supply of cotton buds with plastic stems, including stems made with degradable plastic and bioplastic materials, will be phased out from 27 February 2023. There will be a

transition period of six months before the rules are enforced to allow businesses to use up supplies and source alternative products.

Enforcement for cotton buds with plastic stems will commence on 1 September 2023.

Why ban plastic-stemmed cotton buds?

Each year Western Australians use more than 77 million cotton buds with plastics stems. If flushed down the toilet, the plastic stems are not broken down or screened by wastewater treatment plants and end up in oceans and waterways.

Plastic cotton bud stems are found in large numbers on our beaches and pose an ingestion risk for wildlife.

What is not included in the ban?

- cotton buds and swabs for professional medical, scientific, forensic and law-enforcement purposes where there is no other viable alternative
- cotton buds or swabs that make up part of a testing kit, for example rapid antigen tests
- applicators that are pre-packaged as part of a set, for example cosmetic kit.

What alternatives are there?

- single-use cotton buds made with compostable stems (e.g. bamboo, cardboard or sugarcane) are widely available.



Will it cost more to buy alternative cotton buds?

Paper-stemmed cotton buds weigh more than a plastic-stemmed cotton bud. This will lead to increased costs which may be passed on to consumers. Major supermarkets have committed to switching from plastic-stemmed to compostable cotton buds meaning compliant products will be available in large volumes. This may reduce the purchase price for consumers.

Who will the ban apply to?

The ban applies to all businesses, manufacturers, retailers and distributors that sell or supply cotton buds.

Quick fact

Seventy per cent of people surveyed in WA told us they support the redesign of cotton buds.

Cotton buds with plastic stems are already banned in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, with bans commencing in 2023 in WA, Queensland, South Australia and Victoria.