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US government agencies are banning TikTok, the social media app teens are obsessed with, over cybersecurity fears — here's the full list

Mary Meisenzahl Feb 25, 2020, 8:14 AM



Reuters/Dado Ruvic

TSA is the latest US government agency to ban TikTok on government devices.

TikTok is a short-form video app especially popular among Gen Z, and it has amassed 1.5 billion downloads. Its parent is the

Chinese developer ByteDance.

US lawmakers have expressed concern over possible national security issues, and TikTok has faced accusations of censorship at the request of the Chinese government.

The Pentagon also issued a warning in December that military personnel should delete TikTok from all devices due to "potential security risks associated with its use."

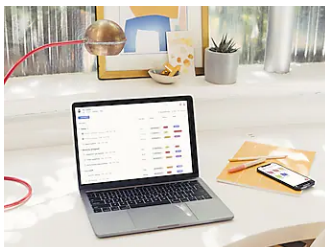
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The Transportation Security Administration became the latest federal agency to ban short-form video app TikTok, which is owned by Chinese company ByteDance.

ByteDance is the highest-valued privately-held company in the world, worth an estimated \$75 billion, and has been called "[China's Facebook](#)" for its size and ownership of popular social networking apps.

It launched the Chinese version of TikTok, Douyin, in 2016, and the international version in 2017. Since then, it has been downloaded 1.5 billion times, and might even be gaining on Instagram and Snapchat in numbers of active users.

The video platform has recently been criticized for censoring content that might offend governments in markets where it operates. In September, The Guardian saw internal documents that instructed moderators to censor content that could anger the Chinese government, including mentions of Tiananmen Square or Tibetan Independence. In a statement, TikTok said that these policies were no longer in use as of May.

US lawmakers have also been critical of TikTok as a potential security risk. In October, Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida asked the Trump administration to investigate the app based on what he called "ample and growing evidence" of censorship at the request of China, while Sens. Chuck Schumer and Tom Cotton wrote a letter to the head of national security asking for an investigation into the app as a counterintelligence risk.

In November, the US Senate held a hearing on technology and data

security and invited representatives from major technology companies, including TikTok. TikTok declined to send a representative. Zhu said he planned to meet with lawmakers about their concerns over TikTok but then canceled the meetings.

"While we think the concerns are unfounded, we understand them and are continuing to further strengthen our safeguards while increasing our dialogue with lawmakers to help explain our policies. We recently reached out to several members of Congress to express an interest in meeting in the near future," a TikTok spokesperson told Business Insider.

The Pentagon has some history of banning devices from government phones, notably Pokemon Go in 2016. Since then, several agencies and branches of the military have banned TikTok.

1. The Navy banned TikTok from government devices.



Sailors stand during a commissioning ceremony for the U.S. Navy's guided missile destroyer, the USS Paul Ignatius, Saturday, July 27, 2019, at Port Everglades in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. AP Photo/Lynne Sladky

On December 16, the Pentagon sent a "Cyber Awareness Message" that "identifies the potential risk associated with using the TikTok app and directs appropriate action for employees to take in order to safeguard their personal information," The Guardian reported. The message also advised military personnel to "uninstall TikTok to circumvent any exposure of personal information."

The following week, the Navy banned TikTok from government-owned devices. A Navy bulletin said that members with TikTok accounts who didn't remove the app from devices would be blocked from the Navy intranet. A Navy spokesperson told The Guardian that generally, Navy personnel are allowed to use social media apps, although sometimes specific apps thought to be security risks are banned.

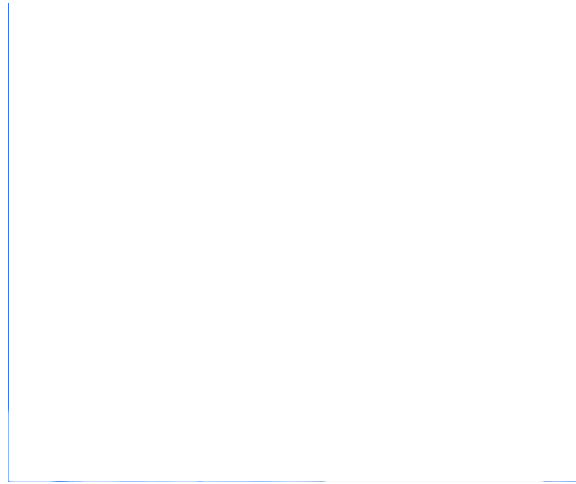
2. The Army had been advising members against using TikTok since mid-December.



FILE - In this Oct. 17, 2017, file photo, U.S. Army soldiers hone their long-distance marksmanship skills as they train at Fort Benning in Columbus, Ga. (AP Photo/John Bazemore, File) Associated Press

TikTok was a tool used by the Army for reaching and recruiting Gen Z, until it was banned from government-owned devices in late September, Military.com reported.

An Army spokesperson told Military.com that TikTok "is considered a cyber threat," and that while the Army cannot ban members from using it on personal devices, it does recommend caution.



3. The Air Force banned TikTok, along with other branches, in early January.



via U.S. Air Force

"The threats posed by social media are not unique to TikTok (though they may certainly be greater on that platform)," an Air Force spokesperson told The Wall Street Journal.

Videos of jet stunts and troops jumping out of planes tend to go viral on the app, and may also pose an additional risk, the Journal reports.

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4. The Coast Guard gave similar reasons for a ban.



The Coast Guard helps preserve the environment, too. Part of the branch's job is fisheries enforcement and making sure vessels don't exceed their legal fishing limit to ensure that the ecosystem stays intact. US Coast Guard

A Coast Guard spokesperson told The New York Times in January: "TikTok is not an application currently used on any official Coast Guard device."

He also said that Coast Guard members go through an annual cyber awareness training.

5. The Marine Corps expressed similar reasoning for a ban in January.



A Marine looks at a digital map on a Target Handoff System v2.0 during a Marine Corps Combat Readiness Evaluation at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, April 20, 2017. US Marine Corps/Pfc. Taylor W. Cooper

"This decision is consistent with our efforts to proactively address existing and emerging threats as we secure and defend our network. This block only applies to government-issued mobile devices," a spokesperson told The New York Times.

6. According to a letter from Sen. Chuck Schumer, the Department of Homeland Security has also banned TikTok from its devices.

Win McNamee/Getty Images

On February 22, Schumer sent a letter to TSA Administrator David Pekoske about the agency allowing TikTok use, and he cited a policy from the Department of Homeland Security that prohibits TikTok on devices, the Associated Press reported. TSA is an agency within DHS.



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7. This week, TSA became the latest agency to specifically ban the app.

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The TSA PreCheck lane at JFK Airport's Terminal 4. Thomas Pallini/Business Insider

On February 23, the TSA released a statement saying a "small

number of TSA employees have previously used TikTok on their personal devices to create videos for use in TSA's social media outreach, but that practice has since been discontinued," the Associated Press reported.

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