

# Surgeon general calls on Congress to require social media warning labels, like those on cigarettes

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United States Surgeon General Dr. Vivek H. Murthy arrives to throw out the first pitch before a baseball game between the Seattle Mariners and the Houston Astros, Wednesday, May 29, 2024, in Seattle. Credit: AP Photo/Lindsey Wasson

The U.S. surgeon general has called on Congress to require warning labels on social media platforms similar to those now mandatory on cigarette boxes.

In a Monday opinion piece in the The New York Times, Dr. Vivek Murthy said that social media is a contributing factor in the mental health crisis among young people.

"It is time to require a [surgeon general](#)'s warning label on [social media platforms](#), stating that social media is associated with significant mental health harms for adolescents. A surgeon general's warning label, which requires [congressional action](#), would regularly remind parents and adolescents that social media has not been proved safe," Murthy said. "Evidence from tobacco studies show that warning labels can increase awareness and change behavior."

Murthy said that the use of just a warning label wouldn't make social media safe for young people, but would be a part of the steps needed.

Last year Murthy warned that there wasn't enough evidence to show that [social media](#) is safe for children and teens. He said at the time that policymakers needed to address the harms of social media the same way they regulate things like car seats, baby formula, medication and other products children use.

He said Monday that Congress needs to implement legislation that will protect [young people](#) from online harassment, abuse and exploitation and from exposure to extreme violence and sexual content.

"The measures should prevent platforms from collecting [sensitive data](#) from children and should restrict the use of features like push notifications, autoplay and infinite scroll, which prey on developing brains and contribute to excessive use," Murthy wrote.

The surgeon general is also recommending that companies be required to share all their data on [health effects](#) with independent scientists and the public, which they currently don't do, and allow independent safety audits.

Murthy said schools and parents also need to participate in providing phone-free times and that doctors, nurses and other clinicians should help guide families toward safer practices.

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