

FAQ

The Environmental Protection (Wet Wipes containing plastic) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025.

What is the ban?

Under The Environmental Protection (Wet Wipes Containing Plastic) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025, it is **prohibited** to sell or supply (whether sold or provided for free) wet wipes containing plastic (except for specific exemptions).

Why is the ban being introduced?

Wet wipes containing plastic are an unnecessary source of plastic, which negatively impact the environment, contributing to plastic pollution in our rivers and oceans when they are incorrectly disposed of.

When they are incorrectly disposed of, wet wipes containing plastic persist in the environment, breaking down into microplastics over time which can be ingested by marine and riverine animals and be harmful to human health by entering into our food chain and water supply. The introduction of the regulations aims to rapidly reduce this environmental harm.

A 2025 report found that 84% of marine litter found contained some form of plastic.

The ban should encourage a shift towards reusable and / or plastic free alternatives already readily available on the market and marks a major step forward in tackling plastic pollution.

What is the definition of a wet wipe containing plastic?

“A non-woven piece of fabric which has been prewetted and which is not designed or intended to be re-used”.

What wipes are in scope of the ban?

The ban applies only to wet wipes containing plastic, not all types of wet wipes.

Under the definition above any wet wipe **containing plastic** is in scope of the ban. These include, but are not limited to:

- baby wipes
- cosmetic face sheet masks
- face and makeup removal wipes
- household cleaning wipes, including wet-mop wipes or pads
- moist toilet tissues
- personal hygiene and deodorant wipes

The ban applies to online and in-person sales.

Why has plastic been used?

Plastic has been used for strength and durability or the way it absorbs and holds the other ingredients.

What is a plastic free wet wipe?

Plastic free wipes are typically made of organic materials such as viscose fibres, Lyocell or cotton.

What consultation or stakeholder engagement has been carried out

A UK wide public consultation on the proposed ban of the sale and supply of wet wipes containing plastic ran from 14 October 2023 to 25 November 2023.

95% of respondents to the [2023 public consultation](#) agreed or strongly agreed with the proposed ban on wet wipes containing plastic.

Are wet wipes containing plastic banned elsewhere?

Each UK Government has introduced legislation to prohibit the sale and supply of wet wipes containing plastic.

Wales introduced regulations on 18 June 2025 which will come into effect 18 months after they were made on 18 December 2026.

Regulations for England were made on 18 November 2025, with the ban coming into force on 19 May 2027.

Scotland introduced legislation on 10 February 2026, with the ban coming into force on 11 August 2027.

When does the ban come into effect in Northern Ireland?

The Environmental Protection (Wet Wipes containing plastic) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025 were made on 18 November 2025. There will be an **18-month** transition period, meaning the regulations will come into effect in May 2027.

This will allow retailers enough time to sell off excess stock and replace products with suitable alternatives.

This transition period will also afford manufacturers time to alter their production processes to produce plastic free alternatives.

Are manufacturers affected by this ban?

This ban **does not** apply to manufacturing. Wet wipes containing plastic can still be manufactured for export or exempt purposes.

However, manufacturers are encouraged to transition to wet wipes which are plastic free. Many manufacturers have already commenced the transition to producing plastic-free wipes.

What are the exemptions to the sale of wet wipes containing plastic?

Under certain circumstances there are exemptions to the sale and supply of wet wipes containing plastic. We acknowledge that, for some uses, plastic-free alternatives are either unsuitable or unavailable. On this basis, we will provide a medical and business-to-business exemption. Our policy on exemptions will ensure that individuals and businesses who have a genuine need for wet wipes containing plastic can access them until there is a viable alternative.

Exemption for Retail Pharmacy Business

Wet wipes containing plastic can be supplied by a retail pharmacy business (registered pharmacy or online pharmacy). However, if available in a registered pharmacy the wet wipes containing plastic must not be placed on the shelves where consumers can access them and must not be offered or provided to the consumer unless they are requested.

Wet wipes containing plastic **must not** be advertised in Northern Ireland by the retail pharmacy business.

Exemption for Medical Purposes

Wet wipes containing plastic are permitted to be supplied if:

- the wet wipe containing plastic is supplied for use for medical purposes under the direction of a healthcare professional;
- the wet wipes containing plastic are supplied by a healthcare professional for medical purposes; or
- a chemist supplies the wet wipes containing plastic for medical purposes. (Retail pharmacy businesses will not be required to ask for evidence of a medical exemption).

Exemption for Business Supplies

Wet wipes containing plastic can be supplied to a person who carries on a business where the supply is for the purposes of that business.

This exemption allows for businesses requiring wet wipes containing plastic (such as hospitals, veterinary surgeries, food production sites etc.) to continue buying these from other businesses, such as wholesalers, or directly from the manufacturer.

How will the ban be enforced?

A person who, in the course of business, supplies or offers to supply wet wipes containing plastic to an end user (except for specific exemptions) is guilty of an offence and may be liable for a fine.

The primary intention of the enforcement approach is to encourage people into compliance with the regulations.

Enforcement of the ban of the sale and supply of wet wipes (18-months after the legislation is laid) will be the responsibility of a person authorised by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

Due to the change in behaviours', consumer demand for environmentally friendly alternatives, many companies are already providing plastic free wet wipes, and the fact there is an 18-month transition period to allow suppliers to use up existing stock and source alternative plastic free options, it is envisaged that there will be widespread compliance with the ban.

Businesses are encouraged to start transitioning to plastic-free wet wipes as quickly as possible to ensure they are fully compliant by the time the ban is introduced.

Are there more environmentally friendly alternatives to wet wipes containing plastic available?

Plastic free wet wipes are already readily available on the market. Some retailers and brands such as Tesco and Boots have already made the switch to plastic free wipes due to consumer demand. Consumers may already be using plastic free wipes without being conscious of this. Businesses will have until May 2027 to transition to the new rules.

If plastic free alternatives are already available, why is there a need to introduce these regulations?

Whilst some outlets have already made the shift to selling plastic free wet wipes, this voluntary effort is not moving at the pace required to eliminate unnecessary plastic pollution.

How can businesses be sure they are selling plastic free wipes?

Businesses can reasonably be expected to check the products they are selling comply with the law. They already do this for other products they sell.

In 2021 the EU brought in a requirement for certain single use products to be clearly labelled if they contain plastic, this includes wet wipes.

Should wet wipes be flushed?

NI Water advise 'only flush three things down our sewers paper, poo and pee, the 3P's.

Sewerage systems are only designed to carry wastewater, human waste and toilet paper.

The ban on wet wipes containing plastic is a step in the right direction in tackling one of the biggest challenges on the sewer network. Plastic in wet wipes make them

stronger and therefore harder to break down, contributing to a large number of sewer blockages.

While the new law targets wipes containing plastic, all wet wipes can contribute to blockages and pollution when flushed. Wipes may be labelled as bio-degradable, or flushable however their decay can be over a long period of time, meaning they can still contribute to sewer blockages.

It is essential that the public play their role by ensuring that wet wipes are binned, rather than flushed.