

FAQs

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?

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

- Antibacterial hand wipes
- 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. For domestic household usage plastic free wipes provide a suitable alternative.

What is a plastic free wet wipe?

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

Plastic free wet wipes are not included in the ban.

Look out for the term 'plastic free' on packaging. Alternatively, products may be labelled 'plastic in product' to make consumers aware that the product contains plastic.

Reusable wet wipes

Reusable wet wipes, which can be safely reused many times, are not included in the ban.

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 16 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 on 18 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.

Exemption for Business Supplies

Wholesalers and manufacturers can continue to sell and supply wet wipes containing plastic to businesses, charities and public sector organisations.

These wet wipes must not be supplied or sold on to individual customers, except by registered pharmacies.

Exemption for Medical Purposes

Wet wipes containing plastic are still permitted for medical purposes. Healthcare professionals can use and supply them.

Exemption for Retail Pharmacy Business

Registered pharmacies can sell wet wipes containing plastic, but only to customers who request them.

Pharmacies must not have them on display or advertise them in store.

How will the ban be enforced?

A person who, in the course of business, supplies or offers to supply wet wipes containing plastic to a consumer (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.

An authorised person will carry out inspections to make sure the rules are being followed. Inspectors have a number of powers, including to:

- visit a shop or store
- make test purchases
- speak to staff
- ask to see records

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.

Regulation and enforcement: What happens if you sell wet wipes containing plastic on or after 18 May 2027?

How the ban is enforced varies between the UK's four nations.

In Northern Ireland, if you're found guilty of supplying wet wipes containing plastic (or offering to), you may receive a fine of up to level 5 £5,000 on summary conviction in a magistrates' court.

What to do with surplus stock of wet wipes containing plastic?

It is envisaged that there should be limited stock left to dispose of as this ban does not come into effect until 18 months after the regulations have been laid.

Any remaining stock after this transition period must be disposed of responsibly, ensuring they do not end up as litter or discarded into the marine environment.

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 17 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 with the 'plastic in product' 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.