

TikTok banned on all Canadian government mobile devices

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Online Desk: Canada announced Monday it is banning TikTok from all government-issued mobile devices, reflecting widening worries from Western officials over the Chinese-owned video sharing app. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said it might be a first step to further action or that it might be it. “I suspect that as government takes the significant step of telling all federal employees that they can no longer use TikTok on their work phones many Canadians from business to private individuals will reflect on the security of their own data and perhaps make choices,” Trudeau said, AP reports.

“I’m always a fan of giving Canadians the information for them to make the right decisions for them,” he added. The European Union’s executive branch said last week it has temporarily banned TikTok from phones used by employees as a cybersecurity measure. The EU’s action follows similar moves in the U.S., where more than half of the states and Congress have banned TikTok from official government devices. Last week, Canada’s federal privacy watchdog and its provincial counterparts in British Columbia, Alberta and Quebec announced an investigation to delve into whether the app complies with Canadian privacy legislation.

TikTok is wildly popular with young people, but its Chinese ownership has raised fears that Beijing could use it to collect data on Western users or push pro-China narratives and misinformation. TikTok is owned by ByteDance, a Chinese company that moved its headquarters to Singapore in 2020. TikTok faces intensifying scrutiny from Europe and America over security and data privacy amid worries that the app could be used to promote pro-Beijing views or sweep up users’ information. It comes as China and the West are locked in a wider tug of war over technology ranging from spy balloons to computer chips.

Canadian Treasury Board President Mona Fortier said the federal government will also block the app from being downloaded on official devices in the future. Fortier said in statement the Chief Information Officer of Canada determined that it “presents an unacceptable level of risk to privacy and security.” The app will be removed from Canadian government issued phones on Tuesday. “On a mobile device, TikTok’s data collection methods provide considerable access to the contents of the phone,” Fortier said. “While the risks of using this application are clear, we have no evidence at this point that government information has been compromised.”

Recent media reports have also raised concerns about potential Chinese interference in recent Canadian elections, prompting opposition parties to call for a public inquiry into alleged foreign election interference. “It’s curious that the Government of Canada has moved to block TikTok on government-issued devices—without citing any specific security concern or contacting us with questions—only after similar bans were introduced in the EU and the US,” a TikTok spokesperson said in a email. The company is always available to discuss the privacy and security of Canadians, the statement said. “Singling out TikTok in this way does nothing to achieve that shared goal,” the email said. “All it does is prevent officials from reaching the public on a platform loved by millions of Canadians.”