

Can text messages increase safer sex behaviours in young people? Intervention development and pilot randomised controlled trial

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Declared competing interests of authors: none

Published July 2016

DOI: 10.3310/hta20570

Plain English summary

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Health Technology Assessment 2016; Vol. 20: No. 57

DOI: 10.3310/hta20570

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Sexually transmitted infections are common in young people. They can cause important health problems such as infertility. People are less likely to get an infection if they use condoms and are tested for sexually transmitted infections. People are less likely to get another infection if they tell their partner. Young people can find it hard to do these things.

Mobile phones are popular with young people. We know that support and educational text messages work to help people stop smoking, but we do not know if they work for sexual health.

We have developed information and support for young people delivered by text message aimed at reducing sexually transmitted infections. This information and support has been designed to help young people use condoms, get tested and tell a partner about an infection. This approach was developed with young people and uses tried and tested approaches to changing behaviour.

We conducted a pilot study, which showed that it is possible to carry out a large-scale study. Young people were happy to join the study. We were able to collect the samples that we needed to test for sexually transmitted infections 12 months later. Young people liked the messages, which increased their knowledge of how to use condoms. They said that the messages reduced stigma about having a sexually transmitted infection and helped them to tell a partner about an infection.

Our research demonstrated that the intervention is acceptable to young people and that a main trial is feasible. A randomised controlled trial is needed to establish the effect of the approach on sexually transmitted infections 12 months later.

ISSN 1366-5278 (Print)

ISSN 2046-4924 (Online)

Impact factor: 4.058

Health Technology Assessment is indexed in MEDLINE, CINAHL, EMBASE, The Cochrane Library and the ISI Science Citation Index.

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This report

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HTA programme as project number 10/93/04. The contractual start date was in March 2013. The draft report began editorial review in July 2015 and was accepted for publication in January 2016. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The HTA editors and publisher have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors' report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the draft document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

This report presents independent research funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The views and opinions expressed by authors in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HTA programme or the Department of Health. If there are verbatim quotations included in this publication the views and opinions expressed by the interviewees are those of the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect those of the authors, those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HTA programme or the Department of Health.

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