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

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Plain English summary

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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.
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