

Behavioural intervention to reduce sexually transmitted infections in people aged 16–24 years in the UK: the safetxt RCT

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Disclaimer: This report contains transcripts of interviews conducted in the course of the research and contains language that may offend some readers.

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Plain English summary

The safetxt RCT

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Plain English summary

Sexually transmitted infections are common in young people and can cause significant health problems. People are less likely to get an infection if they use condoms and get tested before they have sex with a new partner, and people with an infection are less likely to get another infection if they tell their partner, but these things can be hard to do.

In previous research, we developed educational and supportive text messages for and with young people. The messages were intended to help young people use condoms, get tested, tell a partner about an infection and reduce infections. Young people liked the messages. They said that the messages increased knowledge, helped them to talk to partners about infections and helped them to use condoms.

Randomised controlled trials are the best way of testing if a new approach works. We conducted a randomised controlled trial to tell us if this form of health education reduces sexually transmitted infections. We recruited 6248 people. We randomly (i.e. by chance) sent 3123 people the educational messages and 3125 people the control messages about taking part in the trial.

The educational messages did not reduce infections over 12 months. There were slightly more infections in the intervention group. The educational messages increased condom use and slightly increased the number of people telling their partner about an infection but did not change the number of people testing for infections before sex with a new partner. The messages slightly increased the number of people with a new sexual partner or with two or more sexual partners.

The safetxt text messages about partner notification should not be used in the NHS as they may cause people to get more infections. The messages about condom use can help people use condoms and could be used. Sexual behaviour is complex, so the effects of new interventions must be tested in trials.

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