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Evaluation of a digital tool to screen for COVID-19 symptoms among international travellers entering Vanuatu requiring quarantine, 2020

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Abstract

Background: Since March 2020, all travellers to Vanuatu must complete 14 days quarantine in a government-designated facility to prevent importation of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). A short message service (SMS, or "text message") system was developed to identify COVID-19-associated symptom development among travellers in quarantine.

Methods: A trial within cohort study design was conducted with travellers arriving to Vanuatu by air (27/10/2020-7/12/ 2020). Control group participants received standard monitoring (daily in-person visits). Intervention group participants received a daily SMS requesting a response coded for symptom development.

Results: A total of 423 of 495 eligible travellers participated, 170 and 253 participants were allocated to the control and intervention group, respectively. A return SMS was received from 50% of participants that received a SMS. Less than 2% of the intervention group and 0% of the control group reported symptoms.

Discussion: The SMS intervention had a high level of acceptability. SMS is a useful tool to monitor symptom develop among people in quarantine and broader public health programs that require participant follow up.