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Research Summary

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Category (clinical/public health):	Public Health
Data focus:	SHEFA, National

Title Comparison of strategies for daily surveillance for symptom development among international travellers entering Vanuatu requiring quarantine, October to December 2020

Abstract

Background
Since March 2020, all travellers to Vanuatu must complete 14 days quarantine in a government-designated quarantine facilities to prevent the importation of coronavirus diseases 2019 (COVID-19). Public health and nursing staff within SHEFA and other provinces were re-deployed to support the quarantine implementation resulting in closure or delays of some essential health services. Limited and high demand on public health resources means Vanuatu Ministry of Health have to identify alternate strategies to monitor the health status of people in quarantine. A short message service (SMS, or "text message") system was developed to identify COVID-19-associated symptoms among travellers in quarantine.

Method
A trial within cohort study design was conducted with travellers arriving to Vanuatu by air (27/10/2020 – 7/12/2020). Travellers from low-risk countries aged 18+ years were eligible to participate. Individuals with pre-existing respiratory conditions or other health issues identified through health screening before entry were excluded from the study. The control group of the participants received standard monitoring (daily in-person visits). The 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. The SMS intervention had a high level of acceptability

Conclusions
SMS is a useful tool to monitor symptom development among people in quarantine and broader public health programs that require participants follow-up. These findings have implications for COVID-19 response in settings with limited resources.