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Texts aim to fight Aids in Kenya

A new mobile phone text message service is joining the battle against HIV/Aids in Kenya.



People could text their questions on Aids and get a prompt response

People will be able to text questions on the subject to a special number and receive a prompt answer for free.

Subscribers will also get daily tips on how to prevent the infection and to deal with the pandemic.

The non-governmental organisation, One World, is launching the service to coincide with the World Aids Day on Wednesday.

Kenya has declared HIV/Aids a national disaster, since more than two million out of a total population of 32.4 million are HIV positive.

A cumulative number of more than 1.5 million people had died due to Aids.

Mobile platform

The stigma of the disease keeps many away from the country's HIV clinics. Others are not prepared to queue to get answers to their questions.

According to One World, the mobile channel seems to be the best one to reach people in the African country.

“ People can sign on to receive a tip a day on HIV/AIDS related issues



Anthony Mwaniki, One World Kenya ”

Up to 2.5 million Kenyans have a mobile phone, five times more than those with internet access, and the number is likely to grow.

In addition, text messages are popular, easy to use and cheap.

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Though standard texts are limited to 160 characters, the team behind the Kenyan project does not see this as an obstacle.



"People can sign on to receive a tip a day on HIV/Aids related issues, that can range from the use of antiretrovirals to issues regarding how they need to take care of themselves", said One World's business manager in Kenya, Anthony Mwaniki.

The star of the project, however, is a question and answer service, where people are able to text questions via their mobiles.

"These questions are received by us as an e-mail. Then we look at those questions from our database and we give the appropriate response, and this response is then sent back to the person's mobile phone as an SMS," explained Mr Mwaniki.

Language expansion

On a first stage, the service will operate exclusively in English, but a Swahili version will follow suit.

"We are beginning to look at ways of doing that, because people told us they are enjoying the information they are getting, but would want to have it in Swahili," Mr Mwaniki told the BBC's Go Digital programme.



The One World team also plans to offer the service in Swahili

"We already have our HIV database translated into Swahili, and we will be having the SMS community service also available in that language."

Nearly two-thirds of the people who die from Aids live in Sub-Saharan Africa. There are more than 25 million people with HIV living in the region.

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