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Effectiveness of a WhatsApp-based program for nicotine and tobacco cessation among young people

Submission date
08/12/2025

Recruitment status
Recruiting

Registration date
09/12/2025

Overall study status
Ongoing

Last Edited
08/09/2026

Condition category
Mental and Behavioural Disorders

[X] Prospectively registered
[X] Protocol
[ ] Statistical analysis plan
[ ] Results
[ ] Individual participant data
[X] Record updated in last year

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims
Nicotine and tobacco products are widely used by adolescents and young adults in Switzerland. At the same time, WhatsApp is one of the most frequently used digital communication platforms by this age group. Delivering individually tailored, evidence-based coaching messages via WhatsApp is a promising way to support young people in quitting nicotine use. This study aims to test the efficacy of a semi-automated, WhatsApp-based intervention program to support nicotine cessation and reduction in adolescents and young adults.

Who can participate?
Regular (at least weekly) nicotine users aged 16–30 years, including those who use tobacco cigarettes, vapes, snus or multiple nicotine products. Additionally the participants should own a mobile phone.

What does the study involve?
Participants will be assessed at the beginning of the study and at follow-ups after 3 and 6 months. For 12 weeks, participants in the intervention group will receive individually tailored messages designed to motivate them to stop or reduce their nicotine use. These messages will provide advice on dealing with cravings and stressful situations, as well as tips on quitting or reducing nicotine use. They will also have the opportunity to ask a counsellor individual questions via a separate WhatsApp channel. Participants in the control group will not initially have the opportunity to take part in the program, but will be invited to do so after completing the 6-month survey.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?
The possible benefit to participants is that the intervention program will help them to stop or reduce their nicotine use. There are no known risks to participants taking part in this study.

Where is the study run from?
Swiss Research Institute for Public Health and Addiction (Switzerland)

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?
September 2025 to January 2028

Who is funding the study?
Swiss Tobacco Prevention Fund (Switzerland)

Who is the main contact?
Dr Severin Haug, severin.haug@isgf.uzh.ch

Contact information

Type(s)
Principal investigator, Public, Scientific

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Study information

Scientific Title
Efficacy of a WhatsApp-based intervention program for nicotine and tobacco cessation among young people: a randomized controlled trial

Acronym
NicotineFreeCoach

Study objectives
To test the efficacy of a semi-automated, WhatsApp-based intervention program to support nicotine cessation and reduction in adolescents and young adults.

Ethics approval required
Ethics approval required

Ethics approval(s)

Approved 07/12/2025, Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at the University of Zurich (Andreasstrasse 15 PO Box 12, Zurich, 8050, Switzerland; +41 (0)44 635 71 81; chair.ethics.committee@phil.uzh.ch), ref: 25.12.25

Primary study design
Interventional

Allocation
Randomized controlled trial

Masking
Blinded (masking used)

Control
Placebo

Assignment
Parallel

Purpose
Prevention

Study type(s)

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied
Nicotine and tobacco use

Interventions
Participants will be assessed at the beginning of the study and at follow-ups after 3 and 6 months. The researchers will use simple randomization (1:1 ratio) using computer generated random numbers. For 12 weeks, participants in the intervention group will receive individually tailored messages designed to motivate them to stop or reduce their nicotine use. These messages will provide advice on dealing with cravings and stressful situations, as well as tips on quitting or reducing nicotine use. They will also have the opportunity to ask a counsellor individual questions via a separate WhatsApp channel. Participants in the control group will not initially have the opportunity to take part in the program, but will be invited to do so after completing the 6-month survey.

Intervention Type
Behavioural

Primary outcome(s)
1. 7-day point prevalence of nicotine abstinence measured using self-report at 6 months follow up

Key secondary outcome(s)
1. 7-day point prevalence of nicotine abstinence measured using self-report at 3 months follow up

2. 30-day point prevalence of nicotine abstinence measured using self-report at 3 and 6 months follow up

3. Number of days in the previous 30 days on which tobacco or nicotine products were consumed measured using self-report at 3 and 6 months follow up

4. Average amount of nicotine products (tobacco cigarettes/e-cigarettes/smokeless nicotine products) consumed per day measured using self-report at 3 and 6 months follow up

5. Intention to stop nicotine use measured using self-report at 3 and 6 months follow up

6. Self-efficacy to stop nicotine use measured using self-report at 3 and 6 months follow up

7. Quality of life using the WHO-5 Well-Being Index measured using self-report at 3 and 6 months follow up

8. Alcohol use using the Consumption Items of the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT-C) measured using self-report at 3 and 6 months follow up

Completion date
31/01/2028

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria
1. Aged 16-30 years
2. Possession of a mobile phone
3. At least weekly use of tobacco or nicotine products in the previous month

Healthy volunteers allowed
No

Age group
Mixed

Lower age limit
16 Years

Upper age limit
30 Years

Sex
All

Total final enrolment
0

Key exclusion criteria
Does not meet the inclusion criteria

Date of first enrolment

01/04/2026

Date of final enrolment
30/06/2027

Locations

Countries of recruitment
Switzerland

Sponsor information

Organisation
Swiss Research Institute for Public Health and Addiction

Funder(s)

Funder type

Funder Name
Swiss Tobacco Prevention Fund

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan

IPD sharing plan summary
Not expected to be made available

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Protocol article		28/04/2026	08/09/2026	Yes	No