

Information for reviewers / peer review policies (International Journal of One Health)

Peer review is a critical factor in promoting the rigor and high quality of scientific research. The entire scientific community benefits when the peer-review process is timely, thorough, and balanced. The editors of International Journal of One Health greatly appreciate the tremendous collective contribution that reviewers make to our journal and the articles they publish. We hope that the guidelines described below will help facilitate peer review as a conversation between authors and reviewers, and as an essential element of the publication process.

- All peer review for International Journal of One Health is closed, meaning that the identities of the reviewers are kept confidential. Before being sent to reviewers, manuscripts are pre-screened by the editorial office to check that they agree with the criteria for publishing in International Journal of One Health: accordance with the aims and scope of the journal, nature of the study, originality of the results, quantity and quality of data, general conclusions, and presentation of the work with a good quality of English language. If the paper does not fulfill these criteria, it may be rejected at this stage without review.
- Manuscripts deemed suitable for review will be sent to a minimum of two experts chosen by the Editors in Chief. A reviewer invitation for International Journal of One Health is sent out by email from the **Scopemed** (www.ejmanager.com or www.scopemed.org) online system. The invitation includes information about the title and abstract of the manuscript. After agreeing to review the paper, the reviewer has access to the entire manuscript. We encourage reviewers to contact the editorial office at any time if they require additional information or assistance.
- The journal aims for a first decision to be made within 6-8 weeks of receipt of the submission and the Editors-in-Chief make the final decision on publication.

The content of the review

The core of any review is an objective assessment of both the technical rigor and the novelty of the presented work. Key features of a review include:

- An outline of the conceptual advance over previously published work
- A specific recommendation
- The reasons for that recommendation
- A summary of the specific strengths and weaknesses of the paper. In this regard, we encourage referees to comment on the quality and presentation of the figures as well as the validity of the statistical methods used to interpret them. (If necessary, the editors can obtain primary data from the authors for referees' use in these more detailed evaluations.)
- We also encourage reviewers to indicate if the supplementary information is well organized and directly relevant to the main points of the paper.

Some other issues that are often useful to discuss include:

- Alternative hypotheses that are consistent with the available data
- The paper's potential audience (i.e., the relevant fields within the readership of the journal)

- Balanced referencing of the pre-existing literature. In particular, when previously published work has undercut the novelty of the present findings, it is extremely helpful to include in the body of the review detailed citation of the relevant articles and data.

Cover comments to the editors

If some specific aspects of the report seem inappropriate for presentation to the authors, they can be sent as comments for the editors' eyes only. However, all general concerns that impact the reviewer's overall recommendation should be indicated clearly in the comments to the author as well, not just in the comments to the editor. This includes but is not limited to concerns about the level of conceptual advance or significance. In general, the tone of the comments to the authors should be consistent with the tone of the comments to the editors. From the authors' point of view, the final editorial decision should be a direct reflection of the reviewer comments that they receive.

A more general context in which comments to the editor can aid the editorial process is as an executive summary of the comments to the authors. In addition, this is an appropriate place to discuss any suspicions of ethical violations—either in the research itself or in the manner in which it is presented. Such issues might include suspected data manipulation or fraud, plagiarism, duplicate publications, or unethical treatment of animals or research subjects.

Reviews can and should be critical, but we ask reviewers to keep in mind that dismissive language and personalized criticisms may be viewed as reflecting bias or ulterior motives on the part of the referee.

A timely and efficient review process benefits the entire scientific community and is therefore a key editorial goal of *International Journal of One Health*. In most cases, *International Journal of One Health* considers twenty days to be sufficient time to review a manuscript. However, we do appreciate that reviewers juggle a number of priorities. If a referee is willing to review the paper but would require more than twenty days to do so, we ask that she/he contact the editorial office. It is important to inform the editor when a review is likely to be late; a revised estimate of the time until submission of the review and an explanation for the unexpected delay are invariably helpful.

It is important to preserve the objectivity of peer review and public confidence in its rigor and impartiality. For this reason, we ask reviewers to be sensitive to the potential for conflicts of interest, both real and perceived. If any potential impediment to objectivity may exist, reviewers should either decline to review the paper or, in cases when they are uncertain, contact the editor for advice. It is certainly worth considering these issues if a manuscript

(a) originates from an author who has recently had close personal interactions (of a strongly positive or negative nature) with the reviewer,

(b) is identical to some subset of the reviewer's currently active research program, or

(c) impacts a topic in which the reviewer has a financial interest. For example, if the reviewer is collaborating with one of the authors or is preparing to publish a paper that comes to conclusions that overlap those of the manuscript in question, s/he should decline to review it. These issues should be considered as thoroughly as possible based on the initial "Request to Review" e-mail, which contains the author list, title, and abstract of the paper. On occasion, the initial "Request to Review" e-mail does not convey all the relevant information, and the potential conflict of interest is therefore not apparent until the referee agrees to review the

paper and downloads the complete manuscript. In this situation, the referee should contact the editor immediately.

In addition, reviewers may not use the unpublished information described in manuscripts they are reviewing as resources for their own research interests. Likewise, these data, methods, or hypotheses should not influence financial decisions, such as buying or selling stocks. Information that has already been presented as an abstract, at a conference, or in another publication is considered public knowledge and does not require this privileged treatment.

Reviewers must preserve the confidentiality of unpublished work. Any manuscript or abstract sent for peer review is a confidential document and remains so until it is formally published. In some instances, reviewers may feel that it would be helpful to obtain additional advice from a colleague. In such cases, we ask that the reviewer contact the editor in advance to ensure that the editor has the opportunity to take additional information into account before permitting communications that have the potential to violate confidentiality. It is not appropriate to discuss unpublished manuscripts at laboratory meetings or journal clubs. Reviewers can collaborate with trainees (graduate students and post-docs) in the evaluation of manuscripts, and we appreciate that such collaboration functions as an important training exercise. However, we ask that reviewers keep the number of collaborators to a minimum and include the identities of all the individuals involved in the “comments to the editors” component of their review. Regardless, the person originally invited to review the manuscript is ultimately responsible for maintaining confidentiality and for the content and accuracy of the report. We encourage referees to inform collaborating reviewers about appropriate guidelines and ethics for peer review, as outlined in this document.

Reviewing (or re-reviewing) revised manuscripts

For the sake of editorial consistency and fairness to the authors, we request that referees who agree to review one version of a given manuscript also commit to reviewing future revisions if necessary. In an effort to minimize the resulting burden, we make every effort to handle revisions editorially and to curtail unproductive resubmission cycles.

Points to be considered in review

Reviewers should address the points below and indicate whether they consider any required revisions to be;

1. Publishable without revision
2. Publishable after a few revision
3. Publishable only after applying my corrections
4. HUGE Revision must be done
5. REJECT

In general, revisions are likely to be 'Major compulsory revisions' if additional controls are required to support the claims or the interpretations are not supported by the data, if further analysis is required that may change the conclusions, or if the methods used are inadequate or statistical errors have been made.

1. **Is the question posed original, important and well defined?** The research question posed by the authors should be easily identifiable and understood. It is useful to both the editors and authors if reviewers comment on the originality and importance of the study within the context of its field. If the research question is unoriginal because related work has been

published previously, please give references. Reviewers should ask themselves after reading the manuscript if they have learnt something new and if there is a clear conclusion from the study.

2. **Are the data sounds and well controlled?** If you feel that inappropriate controls have been used please say so, indicating the reasons for your concerns, and suggesting alternative controls where appropriate. If you feel that further experimental/clinical evidence is required to substantiate the results, please provide details.

3. **Is the interpretation (discussion and conclusion) well balanced and supported by the data?** The interpretation should discuss the relevance of all the results in an unbiased manner. Are the interpretations overly positive or negative? Conclusions drawn from the study should be valid and result directly from the data shown, with reference to other relevant work as applicable. Have the authors provided references wherever necessary?

4. **Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to allow others to evaluate and/or replicate the work?** Please remark on the suitability of the methods for the study, which should be clearly described and reproducible by peers in the field. If statistical analyses have been carried out, specify whether or not they need to be assessed specifically by an additional reviewer with statistical expertise.

5. **What are the strengths and weaknesses of the methods?** Please comment on any improvements that could be made to the study design to enhance the quality of the results. If any additional experiments are required, please give details. If novel experimental techniques were used please pay special attention to their reliability and validity.

6. **Can the writing, organization, tables and figures be improved?** Although the editorial team may also assess the quality of the written English, please do comment if you consider the standard is below that expected for a scientific publication. If the manuscript is organized in such a manner that it is illogical or not easily accessible to the reader please suggest improvements. Please provide feedback on whether the data are presented in the most appropriate manner; for example, is a table being used where a graph would give increased clarity? Are the figures of a high enough quality to be published in their present form?

7. **When revisions are requested.** Reviewers may recommend revisions for any or all of the following reasons: data need to be added to support the authors' conclusions; better justification is needed for the arguments based on existing data; or the clarity and/or coherence of the paper needs to be improved.

8. **Are there any ethical or competing interests issues you would like to raise?** The study should adhere to ethical standards of scientific/medical research and the authors should declare that they have received ethics approval and or patient consent for the study, where appropriate. Whilst we do not expect reviewers to delve into authors' competing interests, if you are aware of any issues that you do not think have been adequately addressed, please inform the editorial office.

Last updated: 13-09-2014
