

A step-by-step guideline to issue evidence-informed recommendations by NITAGs

Audience

NITAG Executive Secretary, NITAG members and NITAG working group (WG) members

Purpose

To enable NITAGs to issue evidence-informed recommendations briefs to support national immunization policy makers in the development of national immunization strategic and operational plans

For more details

The methodology and evidence used for the development of this guideline are available in a detailed methodological document in the NITAG Resource Center

Step 1

Define the specific question and criteria to consider

By Who? NITAG Executive Secretariat or a Working Group (WG) reporting to the executive secretariat

1.1 Clarify the context of the question

- Who added the recommended topic to the NITAG agenda? (annual work plan, Ministry of health or NITAG member) to seek further clarification if needed
- Why was the recommendation topic added to the agenda? (opportunity of introduction of a new vaccine, ongoing epidemic, new data on vaccine efficacy or disease burden)

1.2 Find a consensus on the key elements of the question to the NITAG by specifying:

- intervention (new vaccine introduction, immunization schedule change)
- target population (age, sex, disease, settings)
- reference situation (national and international current recommendations)

If several reference situations are of interest, a separate question for each should be framed.

1.3 Frame the specific question using the consensus target population, intervention and reference situation and outcomes: “In HIV infected infants, should the measles immunization schedule be modified in comparison with the generally recommended schedule?”

1.4 Identify and rank by importance the outcome criteria to consider in making the recommendation (Non-critical, Important, Critical)

- Include critical and important outcome criteria in the recommendation
- See outcome criteria ranking checklist in Annex 1

1.5 Synthesize the information by filling the question worksheet with:

- the specific question properly defined
- the outcome criteria defined as critical and important

Step 2

Assess and summarize the evidence

By Who? NITAG executive secretary, Working Groups or Consultants (as applicable)

2.1 Identify and collect the evidence, using GRADE methodology

- Global sources: [WHO database](#); [Cochrane library](#); [NITAG Resource Center](#); [MEDLINE/PubMed](#)
- Local sources: MoH; Universities, grey literature
- National sources: NITAGs, DHS (in the sub-region)
- Specialized databases: Centre for reviews and dissemination, the On-Line International Vaccine Economics and Statistics (OLIVE)

2.2 Assess the quality of evidence (Systematic reviews, randomized control trials...)

2.3 Synthesis of the body of evidence in a background document

- Analyze and synthesize the evidence
- Draft the background document: describe the main findings: the lack of evidence on any criterion of interest should be acknowledged
- Include the bibliography of the sources

Step 3

Draft and adopt the evidence-informed recommendations

3.1 Evaluate the body of evidence and discuss options for an evidence-informed recommendation brief

- Evaluate health benefits and harms
- Evaluate programmatic, economic, equity, acceptability and ethical aspects
- Reevaluate if necessary the relative importance of the criteria after reviewing the evidence
- Provide experts opinion for criteria for which evidence is lacking
- Identify options for the recommendation and characterize their consequences

3.2 Develop draft evidence-informed recommendation brief and prepare documents to present to the NITAG members

- Develop the draft evidence-informed recommendation brief : should be clear and concise, with sufficient information that can be understood without any reference to other supporting material
- Develop draft evidence-informed recommendation brief (follow the template) (annex 10)
 - Present objective
 - ✓ Answer the specific question(s)
 - ✓ Justify the recommendation that is made
 - Present the search methodology
 - Describe the WG that gathered and analyzed evidence and identified the options for the recommendation
 - Describe outcome criteria considered (specified outcome criteria for which evidence was lacking) and evidence reviewed
 - Describe the options for the recommendation: for each option, include the information reviewed from step 3.1, its strengths and weaknesses
- Develop presentation to the NITAG
- Provide the NITAG members with the draft evidence-informed recommendation draft and the background documents at least 10 days before the NITAG meeting

3.3 Presentation, discussion, deliberation and decision on the proposed evidence-informed recommendation draft

- Schedule NITAG meeting so as to allow adequate time for discussion of each proposed recommendation (meeting may need to be extended if necessary)
- NITAG members should:
 - Discuss the options that are being proposed and the evidence on what they are based
 - Balance benefits and downsides of each option
 - Decisions on proposed options can be made by vote or consensus following the NITAG terms of reference
- NITAG members may choose not to make a recommendation if there is :
 - No evidence or Insufficient evidence

After the meeting

NITAG executive secretary should issue a **final version** of the evidence-informed recommendation brief that was adopted.
NITAG members **should endorse the final recommendation within two weeks** following the NITAG meeting