

Considerations for forming a regional COVID-19 review committee (RRC)

TECHNICAL BRIEF

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This document provides considerations for establishing a regional COVID-19 review committee (RRC) for COVID-19 vaccination to manage and oversee the review of the national deployment and vaccination plans (NDVP) submitted by countries. The RRC can be made up of multiple teams, depending on regional needs. Draft terms of reference (ToR) are provided in Annex 1, which can be adapted by regions to clearly outline their operating process and procedures.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Regional review committee

- Each region should establish a NDVP RRC and adapt ToRs to govern the review process.
- The RRC should represent the breadth of expertise needed to review plans for deployment of vaccines and vaccination of target populations.

STEP 1.

Establish an RCC by end of January 2021 and adapt the ToR to govern the regional review process

- NDVP reviews will be coordinated through the RRC Secretariat (see draft ToR). The RRC Secretariat will receive automated notice of NDVP submission for countries in their region once the NDVP is uploaded to the COVID-19 Partners Platform.
- The RRC Secretariat will assign and schedule the NDVPs for review, support scheduling of consensus calls, support finalization of the consensus Standard Review Form (SRF), and upload the final SRF to the COVID-19 Partners Platform.

STEP 2.

Each region should organize the RRC based on the anticipated workload, as the number of countries submitting NDVPs will vary by region.

- The number of review teams within the RRC should be driven by the regional approach for reviewing NDVPs and the number of anticipated NDVPs.
- The working assumption is that each NDVP submitted should be reviewed and finalized within 3 (target) to 5 (maximum) business days of country submission and should culminate in a scheduled call of the RRC to arrive at consensus on recommendations with one completed SRF per country. It is anticipated that one review team can handle multiple NDVP reviews in a week. Regions may wish to conduct a pilot review process to help finetune timing assumptions.
- The RRC and review teams should be formed by end of January 2021. RRCs should be ready to begin reviewing NDVPs by late January 2021.

Composition of the regional COVID-19 review committee

The RRC should represent the breadth of expertise needed to review plans for deployment of vaccines and vaccination of target populations. Selection of reviewers for RRCs should be based on experience and areas of expertise. The RRC should be balanced with regard to experience in vaccine introduction; working experience at national and/or subnational level in immunization programmes; vaccine pharmacovigilance; immunization data management and monitoring; vaccine-preventable disease surveillance; supply chain and logistics; regulatory processes; demand generation, vaccine uptake and community engagement; and costing and budgeting as outlined in the ToR (see Annex 1).

In the regions where review of NDVPs in different languages is anticipated, the RRC should include members who have the capacity to review the plans in the relevant languages in order to meet the tight timelines.

Strategies for planning regional NDVP reviews

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Planning

- Regions should anticipate the number of NDVPs expected to be submitted and develop a submission timeline in consultation with countries.
- Regions should establish a process to monitor country progress toward NDVP submission.
- Countries can start uploading NDVPs to the COVID-19 Partners Platform from 25 January 2021 and on a continuing basis.

A review process that supports assessing country readiness, budgets and identifying any gaps is important to assist countries to be fully prepared to deploy vaccines and vaccinate their target populations. The regional review process can also support an assessment of technical assistance needs to ensure timely and comprehensive country readiness. Where additional donor support is available to countries, regions should encourage the respective donors to use the NDVP as the “one country plan” and main framework for support. Some self-funded countries may seek regional review of their NDVP to assist them in optimal preparedness.

To determine the number and cadence of anticipated NDVP reviews that will need to be conducted, it is recommended that each region:

- 1) Identify the countries eligible for and seeking support from the various funding organizations including Gavi, the World Bank and other donor agencies in each region.
- 2) Establish a process to determine if self-financing countries plan to participate in the review process and identify all countries likely to submit NDVPs for review.
- 3) Take into consideration any specific guidance and expectations the region has provided to countries regarding development, submission and review of NDVPs.

Once a list of the countries that will submit NDVPs for review is developed, a process to monitor progress on NDVP development with countries and regional partners and anticipated submission dates should be established. This can be done using the [COVID-19 Vaccine Introduction Readiness Assessment Tool](#). This will support development of the projected timeline and the anticipated number of NDVPs that will be submitted each week.



Review team orientation and planning

The RRCs should meet to plan the projected numbers of reviews, the process for assignment and workflow in the team to prepare for the review process. The review process should be on a continuous basis. Each region should plan a schedule that will allow them to meet the target review timeframes and align with the timing of the vaccine allocation rounds and communicate this to the countries.

WHO headquarters provided an orientation training for RRC members on 14 and 15 January 2021. Materials have also been made available on OpenWHO platform – COVID-19 (openwho.org) for individual viewing as needed. The training covers how to use the SRF, conduct the reviews using the user's guide, recording key information on the form and options for how to submit and upload the SRF to the COVID-19 Partners Platform.



Annex 1: Regional COVID-19 Review Committee (RRC), draft Terms of Reference

The below ToR are intended to serve as a basis to be adapted by the regions.

Note: The text in italics within parentheses are placeholders with guidance for each region to complete as appropriate to their local context.

1. Purpose

The National Deployment and Vaccination Plan (NDVP) constitutes a country's overall plan to deploy vaccines and deliver vaccination to identified target populations. All countries should ideally have a national plan to enable preparedness and guide the implementation of COVID-19 vaccination. The NDVP is considered the "one country plan" and main framework for a country's COVID-19 vaccine deployment and vaccination efforts, including for the World Bank and Gavi support to the Advanced Market Commitment (AMC) 92 countries (AMC 92).

The RRC will conduct a technical review of the NDVPs submitted by countries to: (a) gauge preparedness for vaccine introduction; and (b) provide recommendations to countries for how to strengthen their plans. For AMC 92 countries, the NDVPs must be reviewed by a RRC to trigger allocation of the COVID-19 vaccine. The RRC will play an important role in making recommendations for allocation of COVID-19 vaccine through the COVAX Facility for the AMC 92 countries.

2. Membership

The membership, resources, responsibilities and authorities of the RRC to perform its role effectively are stipulated in these ToRs.

[WHO and/or UNICEF regional offices will appoint the RRC, chair and/or co-chair of the committee and determine the selection of RRC members based on available skills and expertise across the regional COVID-19 task force/working groups and assess the need to invite or nominate other technical partners into the process. Two Gavi independent review committee (IRC) representatives should be included as members in the RRC as well as the regional WHO vaccine safety officer. The number of members on the team should be driven by the regional strategy for reviewing NDVPs and the number of anticipated NDVPs to be submitted along with projected country submission timelines. A region could determine the need for more than one review team within the RRC or include more than one member for each area of expertise to facilitate the review process.]

The members should have signed a declaration of potential conflicts of interest (see Section 5.E.) and a confidentiality agreement (see Section 5.F.).

a. Composition and size

[The composition of the RRC shall allow it to function efficiently and effectively in fulfilling its functions and responsibilities, with adequate capacity to manage the reviews for the number of NDVPs expected. The RRC capacity should be sufficient to complete the reviews within a minimum 3 (target) to 5 (maximum) business days. The composition of the RRC is intended to comprise individuals suitably competent in the issues falling within the ToR so as to be able to provide recommendations to the country with sound advice on matters.]

b. Competencies and skills

The RRC membership shall be representative of a range of expertise that aligns with the technical areas of the NDVP, representing the breadth needed to review plans for deployment of vaccines and vaccination of target populations. At minimum, the RRC should include expertise in: (a) national and subnational immunization implementation and/or experience with new vaccine introduction; (b) vaccine pharmacovigilance; (c) epidemiology and disease control; (d) cold chain and logistics; (e) regulatory processes; and (f) financial and budget analysis. Other experts may be included based on regional needs including public health professionals, health systems specialists and policy experts. Care should be taken to ensure gender-balanced membership and that expertise in equity and ethics are considered as membership is planned. The RRC should be able to call upon additional external experts, including from academia, as needed.

Each member of the RRC will receive an orientation training to the NDVP review process and tools.

3. Authority

The RRC shall have reasonable access to information required for the review process, to regional and country readiness and delivery (CRD) personnel, relevant other parties, and external expertise as appropriate.

The mandate of the RRC is established in these ToR.

4. Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of the RRC to conduct a review of the NDVP using the standardized SRF and accompanying user's guide to ensure the country NDVPs are of sound quality with adequate planning around the minimum criteria to be met for vaccine allocation (please see accompanying document on the review process and the SRF).

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