



Guidelines for Articles Submitted to the Public Health Bulletin of South Africa (PHBSA)

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Aim

Scope

The PHBSA is an internally reviewed public health bulletin that is freely available on-line. It is published by the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD), a division of the National Health Laboratory Service (NHLS), in collaboration with the National Institute for Occupational Health (NIOH), NHLS. The PHBSA serves as a vehicle for the critical analysis of current and retrospective disease epidemiology/public health information in South Africa.

The PHBSA editorial team will only consider reports addressing pertinent public health concerns in South Africa and/or the broader southern African region. Submitted reports should be original and should not contain previously published information. The aim and objectives of the report should be clearly stated. Data presented in the report should be adequate to address the topic, and should be analysed and interpreted using standard scientific/epidemiological/statistical methods. The conclusions should be supported by the data and actionable recommendations must be provided, especially in terms of prevention, control/elimination and best practice.

Standard IMRAD format

This standard format i.e. Summary, Introduction/Background, Methods, Results, Discussion, Limitations & Conclusions, Recommendations, Acknowledgements, References makes it easier for your readers to find the information they need. When you are writing your article, be careful not to confuse the roles of each section.

Write surveillance, epidemiological, research and outbreak reports in the standard IMRAD format. Additional elements specific to those reports types can be included as sub-headings. See Appendices 1 and 2.

Review or opinion pieces and case studies should contain a summary, appropriate brief introduction followed by sections with sub-headings and a conclusion with recommendations.

Title	Aim for less than 15 words. The title should speak to person, place and time
Authors and Affiliations	See below
Summary	Present the summary as one paragraph without headings but follow this basic format. Background: Essential context to the study/surveillance including key facts Aim: one sentence clearly stating the aim of the surveillance or research. Methods: brief summary of study design, data source/s, and statistical analyses Results/Key findings: briefly present the key findings that support the public health message. Give key numeric data (including confidence intervals, p values and other informative statistical indicators), where possible. Conclusion/Recommendations/Public health message: state the implications of the findings for public health practice and any recommendations for policy, practice, prevention and control. The data must support and justify the recommendations. All information in the abstract should be included in the corresponding section of the body of the report. Do not include any references in the abstract.
INTRODUCTION Give pertinent background information on the topic and explain why the surveillance/epidemiological study/research question is important	Describes the disease/syndrome or health threat under surveillance or investigation. Answers the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is the added value of the surveillance or research?• Why is your aim or research question important? What is the rationale or justification for doing the study? Lists the aim(s) and objective(s) of the study.
METHODS Describe how the study/surveillance/research was conducted	List the details about conducting your study: The components of this section will vary depending on the study. Use subheadings for the components of the methods. Share the basic study design. Briefly describe the methods used. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who? Study population and sampling strategy. Any inclusion or exclusion criteria• Where? A description of the setting for the study• What? Include condition, case definitions and study period• Intervention (if appropriate):

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How? <p>Data collection and analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe data capture and sources, verification/de-duplication and cleaning. Describe data collection tools and methods, and any key limitations / gaps • Specify response rate where relevant (e.g., for survey data) • Describe specimen collection, laboratory testing • Describe the analysis process i.e. the statistical methods used or steps followed in qualitative data analysis, α levels for significance tests • List the statistical software used for analysis, with the version and manufacturer in parentheses after the software name e.g. "SAS software (version 9.4; SAS Institute) was used to conduct all analyses." <p>Ethical approval: Include all relevant permissions and approvals under the appropriate heading.</p> <p>If methods for data collection in ongoing surveillance systems and some other databases have been published previously, reference the relevant publication/s and indicate that these are standardized methods. Describe any deviations from the standardized methods that were utilized during the data collection and analysis.</p>
<p>RESULTS Present the collated data and analysis</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State the main findings. • Present the results of your study in a logical sequence that addresses the aim and objectives of your study • Move from simple to complex • Begin by describing the demographics • Include tables and figures • Accompany tables and figures with brief descriptions of the most important patterns or features in the data including all pertinent statistical indices, especially significance (P) values and levels
<p>DISCUSSION Interpret the results within the limitations of the data set</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin by stating the conclusions of the report without reiterating details of the results • Provide your interpretation of the results • Link your overall results back to your objectives • Interpret each of your results and convey their public health meaning • Put the results into context by explaining how the key findings relate to previous research or to existing knowledge, practice or policy (comparative or corroborative) • Describe the strengths and limitations of your study. Limitations are aspects of the data or analysis that might affect the accuracy or validity of results. Indicate how each limitation might have affected the results
<p>CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS Draw supportable conclusions within the limitations of the data set, and provide actionable recommendations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write a conclusion that summarises the results and their significance in relation to each objective of the study • Provide any key implications for public health practice or recommendations for policy, practice, prevention and control. Ensure that the recommendations are justified by the analysis presented in the report. • Provide SMART recommendations i.e. Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant/Realistic, Time-bound. See https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/yac/smart-framework.htm • When appropriate, include specific examples of successful public health interventions • If the report points to specific knowledge gaps that should be addressed to better inform public health practice, describe these in the Discussion section, not as a recommendation that "more research is needed"
Other components	Acknowledgements including funding, ethical considerations/permissions, conflicts of interest
References	Please see the PHBSA style guide and UCT: Vancouver reference style guide at https://libguides.lib.uct.ac.za/c.php?g=182394&p=1202253
<p>Acknowledgement: CDC Foundation. Standard IMRAD format. Writing for Public Health Bulletin workshop, South Africa. 2024.</p> <p>African Journal of Primary Health Care and Family Medicine. Submission guidelines. Available at: https://phcfm.org/index.php/phcfm/pages/view/submission-guidelines</p>	

Types of Reports:

We consider eight report types for publication in the PHBSA:

a. Surveillance Reports: These are published on acceptance once all editorial and review processes are complete. They describe and analyse provincial or national trends in disease/syndrome epidemiology or health threat over a defined period. They should include a critical analysis of the epidemiological trends and provide actionable recommendations for management and control of the disease/syndrome or threat.

Word limit	Surveillance reports should be succinct (aim for no more than 3000 words not including references) and should contain only essential figures and tables.
Summary	<p>Approximately 250 words. Present as one paragraph without headings (unstructured) but follow this basic format.</p> <p>Background: essential context to the study/surveillance including key facts.</p> <p>Aim: one sentence clearly stating the aim of the surveillance.</p> <p>Methods: description of the surveillance system, time period the report covers, data source/s, demographics and statistical analyses</p> <p>Results/Key findings: briefly present the key findings that support the public health message. Include key numeric data (including confidence intervals around means, p values and other informative statistical indicators).</p> <p>Conclusion/Recommendations/Public health message: state the implications of the findings for public health practice and summarise key recommendations for policy, practice, prevention and control.</p> <p>All information in the abstract should be included in the corresponding section of the body of the report. Do not include any references in the abstract. See Appendix 1</p>
Main text	<p>This should be written in the standard format i.e., Introduction/Background, Aims/Objectives, Methods, Results (including necessary tables and figures), succinct Discussion, Conclusions and SMART Recommendations, Funding statement, Acknowledgements, Author declaration, Ethics statement, References.</p> <p>See Appendix 1</p>
References	<p>Only essential references should be included – preferably no more than 15.</p> <p>Articles should be referenced using Vancouver referencing style, but the journal names should be in italics</p> <p>See the PHBSA style guide and UCT: Vancouver reference style guide https://libguides.lib.uct.ac.za/c.php?g=182394&p=1202253</p>
Tables, figures and graphs	<p>Number all figures and tables clearly, and provide an explanatory legend for each. All figures and tables must be referred to in the text. Figures and tables should not include abbreviations - if they do these should be explained in a footnote. Figures or tables and their accompanying legends should contain sufficient information to enable them to stand alone.</p> <p>See the PHBSA style guide</p>
Formatting requirements	<p>Figures should be included in the text and also sent as a separate file in excel or PowerPoint.¹ For graphic files, use Arial font. Legends to figures should appear below each figure. Submit photographs as JPEG files. Submit phylogenetic trees and Spanning trees in PowerPoint (or convert PowerPoint slides into JPEG/TIFF images). Submit map images in JPEG or PowerPoint.</p> <p>Write articles in Microsoft Word (Arial 10) with text single-spaced and fully justified. Leave a space between paragraphs. After a full stop, leave one space before starting the next sentence. Insert figures/tables/pictures into their appropriate places in the text and submit high-resolution figures and pictures as separate files (excel/JPEG/PowerPoint). Italicise (rather than underline) scientific names.</p> <p>See the PHBSA style guide</p>
Conflicts of interest	Clearly state any conflicts of interest on the part of any of the authors. Should there be no conflicts of interest, give a statement to this effect in the manuscript.
Acknowledgements including funding	Acknowledge all funders as appropriate including grant numbers if available.
Ethical	Give details of ethical clearance certificates where/if necessary. If ethical clearance was not

clearance/Permissions required, please indicate by 'not applicable'.

b. Epidemiological / Cluster Reports:

These should contain detailed information relating to incidence, trends, clinical features and specialised management of diseases affecting defined population groups such as adolescents, hospitalised patients, care-home residents, public sector consultations, private sector consultations and clustered data from specific surveillance programmes. Reported events can include epidemics, outbreaks, unusual disease clusters, poisonings, exposures to disease or disease agents (including environmental and toxic), and notable public health-related case reports. These reports can also include environmental indicators such as wastewater surveillance for specific pathogens. Expedited production and distribution of these reports is possible if the information they contain is especially urgent in terms of disease prevention, control and management.

Word limit	Epidemiological and cluster reports should be succinct (preferably no more than 2000 words not including references) and should contain only essential figures and tables.
Summary	<p>Approximately 250 words. Present as one paragraph without headings (unstructured) but follow this basic format.</p> <p>Background: Essential context to the study/surveillance including key facts</p> <p>Aim: one sentence clearly stating the aim of the surveillance.</p> <p>Methods: brief summary of study design, data source/s, and statistical analyses</p> <p>Results/Key findings: briefly present the key findings that support the public health message. Include key numeric data (including confidence intervals or p values and other informative statistical indicators).</p> <p>Conclusion/Recommendations/Public health message: state the implications of the findings for public health practice and summarise key recommendations for policy, practice, prevention and control.</p> <p>All information in the abstract should be included in the corresponding section of the body of the report. Do not include any references in the abstract.</p> <p>See Appendix 1</p>
Main text	<p>This should be written in the standard format i.e., Introduction/Background, Aims/Objectives, Methods, Results (including necessary tables and figures), succinct Discussion, Conclusions and SMART Recommendations, Funding statement, Acknowledgements, Author declaration, Ethics statement, References.</p> <p>These reports may include a description of the onset of an event (how or when it was noticed), magnitude and extend of the event, detailed information relating to geographical area, case numbers/incidence, trends, exposures, clinical features and treatments, and outcomes of conditions/diseases affecting defined population groups. Environmental indicators such as wastewater surveillance for specific pathogens may also be reported.</p> <p>See Appendix 1</p>
References	<p>Only essential references should be included – preferably no more than 15. Articles should be referenced using Vancouver referencing style, but the journal names should be in italics</p> <p>REFER TO: PHBSA style guide and UCT: Vancouver reference style guide</p> <p>https://libguides.lib.uct.ac.za/c.php?g=182394&p=1202253</p>
Tables, figures and graphs	<p>Number all figures and tables clearly, and provide an explanatory legend for each. All figures and tables must be referred to in the text. Figures and tables should not include abbreviations - if they do these should be explained in a footnote. Figures or tables and their accompanying legends should contain sufficient information to enable them to stand alone.</p> <p>See the PHBSA style guide</p>
Formatting requirements	<p>Figures should be included in the text and also sent as a separate file in excel or PowerPoint.1 For graphic files, use Arial font. Legends to figures should appear below each figure. Submit photographs as JPEG files. Submit phylogenetic trees and Spanning trees in PowerPoint (or convert PowerPoint slides into JPEG/TIFF images). Submit map images in JPEG or PowerPoint.</p>

	Write articles in Microsoft Word (Arial 10) with text single-spaced and fully justified. Leave a space between paragraphs. After a full stop, leave one space before starting the next sentence. Insert figures/tables/pictures into their appropriate places in the text and submit high-resolution figures and pictures as separate files (excel/JPEG/PowerPoint). Italicise (rather than underline) scientific names. See the PHBSA style guide
Conflicts of interest	Clearly state any conflicts of interest on the part of any of the authors. Should there be no conflicts of interest, give a statement to this effect in the manuscript.
Acknowledgements including funding	Acknowledge all funders as appropriate including grant numbers where available.
Ethical clearance/Permissions	Give details of ethical clearance certificates where/if necessary. If ethical clearance was not required, please indicate by 'not applicable'.

c. Outbreak Reports: These are generally produced at the end of an outbreak investigation. They give a complete overview of the epidemiology of the outbreak including its clinical features and possible causes, patient outcomes and recommendations for future prevention, control and management.

These reports should include a summary followed by a critical analysis of incidence statistics and trends, epidemiologic timeline, public health impact, lessons learned and recommendations for best practice. They should be written in the standard format i.e. Summary, Introduction/Background, Methods, Results, Discussion & Conclusions, SMART Recommendations, Acknowledgements, References. Only essential references should be included – preferably no more than 10.

Word limit	Outbreak reports should be succinct (aim for no more than 2000 words not including references) and should contain only essential figures and tables.
Summary	Approximately 250 words. Present as one paragraph without headings (unstructured) but follow this basic format Background: Essential context to the outbreak including key facts. One to three sentences establishing the existence of the outbreak or underlying public health problem. Aim: one sentence clearly stating the aim of the report. Methods: state that an outbreak investigation was conducted, when and by whom. Give a brief summary of the study design, data source/s and statistical analyses. Results/Key findings: briefly present the key findings that support the public health message. Include key numeric data (including confidence intervals or p values and other informative statistical indicators). Describe measures taken to contain the outbreak. Conclusion/Recommendations/Public health message: state the implications of the findings for public health practice and any actions (for practice, prevention and control) that should be taken in response to the investigation. All information in the abstract should be included in the corresponding section of the body of the report. Do not include any references in the abstract.
Main text	This should generally follow the standard format with some elements specific to outbreak reports included (Abstract, Introduction/Background, Investigation/Methods, Results, Public Health response /Discussion & Conclusions, SMART Recommendations, Acknowledgements, References). Separate sections such as Epidemiologic Investigation, Environmental Health Investigation and Laboratory Investigation can be used to describe different aspects of the response. See Appendix 2: What to include in an Outbreak report
References	Only essential references should be included – preferably no more than 10. Existing consensus recommendations may be included. Articles should be referenced using Vancouver referencing style, but the journal names should be in italics See the PHBSA style guide and UCT: Vancouver reference style guide https://libguides.lib.uct.ac.za/c.php?g=182394&p=1202253
Tables, figures and graphs	Number all figures and tables clearly, and provide an explanatory legend for each. All figures and tables must be referred to in the text. Figures and tables should not include abbreviations - if they do these should be explained in a footnote. Figures or tables and their accompanying legends should contain sufficient information to enable them to stand alone. See the PHBSA style guide

Formatting requirements	<p>Figures should be included in the text and also sent as a separate file in excel or PowerPoint.1 For graphic files, use Arial font. Legends to figures should appear below each figure. Submit photographs as JPEG files. Submit phylogenetic trees and Spanning trees in PowerPoint (or convert PowerPoint slides into JPEG/TIFF images). Submit map images in JPEG or PowerPoint.</p> <p>Write articles in Microsoft Word (Arial 10) with text single-spaced and fully justified. Leave a space between paragraphs. After a full stop, leave one space before starting the next sentence. Insert figures/tables/pictures into their appropriate places in the text and submit high-resolution figures and pictures as separate files (excel/JPEG/PowerPoint). Italicise (rather than underline) scientific names.</p> <p>See the PHBSA style guide</p>
Conflicts of interest	Clearly state any conflicts of interest on the part of any of the authors. Should there be no conflicts of interest, give a statement to this effect in the manuscript.
Acknowledgements including funding	Acknowledge all funders as appropriate including grant numbers where available.
Ethical clearance/Permissions	Give details of ethical clearance certificates where/if necessary. If ethical clearance was not required, please indicate by 'not applicable'.

d. Reviews / Opinion Pieces: These are succinct snapshot analyses of specific public health topics that are current and affect the prevention, management control of the diseases, syndromes or health threats under review. These should include a summary, essential and appropriate background information, critical review of current information/statistics/indicators, recommendations for best practice and an appraisal of the public health significance of the subject under review. Recognised subject experts generally produce these.

Word limit	Review/Opinion pieces should be succinct (aim for no more than 2000 words not including references) and should contain only essential figures and tables.
Summary	Approximately 250 words. Present as one paragraph without headings (unstructured) All information in the abstract should be included in the corresponding section of the body of the report. Do not include any references in the abstract.
Main text	Include a summary, essential and appropriate background information, critical review of current information/statistics/indicators that may include use of sub-headings, recommendations for best practice and an appraisal of the public health significance of the subject under review.
References	<p>Include only essential references – preferably no more than 20. Articles should be referenced using Vancouver referencing style, but the journal names should be in italics</p> <p>See the PHBSA style guide and UCT: Vancouver reference style guide https://libguides.lib.uct.ac.za/c.php?g=182394&p=1202253</p>
Tables, figures and graphs	<p>Number all figures and tables clearly, and provide an explanatory legend for each. All figures and tables must be referred to in the text. Figures and tables should not include abbreviations - if they do these should be explained in a footnote. Figures or tables and their accompanying legends should contain sufficient information to enable them to stand alone.</p> <p>See the PHBSA style guide</p>
Formatting requirements	<p>Figures should be included in the text and also sent as a separate file in excel or PowerPoint.1 For graphic files, use Arial font. Legends to figures should appear below each figure. Submit photographs as JPEG files. Submit phylogenetic trees and Spanning trees in PowerPoint (or convert PowerPoint slides into JPEG/TIFF images). Submit map images in JPEG or PowerPoint.</p> <p>Write articles in Microsoft Word (Arial 10) with text single-spaced and fully justified. Leave a space between paragraphs. After a full stop, leave one space before starting the next sentence. Insert figures/tables/pictures into their appropriate places in the text and submit high-resolution figures and pictures as separate files (excel/JPEG/PowerPoint). Italicise (rather than underline) scientific names.</p>

	See the PHBSA style guide
Conflicts of interest	Clearly state any conflicts of interest on the part of any of the authors. Should there be no conflicts of interest, give a statement to this effect in the manuscript.
Acknowledgements including funding	Acknowledge all funders as appropriate including grant numbers where available.

e. Case Studies / Series: These describe the clinical features, progression and outcome/s of a specific disease or syndrome affecting one or a small group of patients. Give details relating to case management and provide recommendations for best practice.

Word limit	Case studies / series reports should be succinct (aim for no more than 2000 words not including references) and should contain only essential figures and tables.
Summary	Approximately 250 words. Present as one paragraph without headings (Unstructured). Do not include references.
Main text	Case studies / series reports should include: summary, essential and appropriate background information, critical review of the clinical, laboratory and other pertinent features of the case/s, treatment, clinical course and outcome, lessons learned and recommendations for best practice where appropriate, acknowledgements, references. Sub-headings can be included. Data highlighted in the text may also be presented in a table or figure.
References	Include only essential references– preferably no more than 5. Articles should be referenced using Vancouver referencing style, but the journal names should be in italics See the PHBSA style guide and UCT: Vancouver reference style guide https://libguides.lib.uct.ac.za/c.php?g=182394&p=1202253
Tables, figures and graphs	Number all figures and tables clearly, and provide an explanatory legend for each. All figures and tables must be referred to in the text. Figures and tables should not include abbreviations - if they do these should be explained in a footnote. Figures or tables and their accompanying legends should contain sufficient information to enable them to stand alone. See the PHBSA style guide
Formatting requirements	Figures should be included in the text and also sent as a separate file in excel or PowerPoint.1 For graphic files, use Arial font. Legends to figures should appear below each figure. Submit photographs as JPEG files. Submit phylogenetic trees and Spanning trees in PowerPoint (or convert PowerPoint slides into JPEG/TIFF images). Submit map images in JPEG or PowerPoint. Write articles in Microsoft Word (Arial 10) with text single-spaced and fully justified. Leave a space between paragraphs. After a full stop, leave one space before starting the next sentence. Insert figures/tables/pictures into their appropriate places in the text and submit high-resolution figures and pictures as separate files (excel/JPEG/PowerPoint). Italicise (rather than underline) scientific names. See the PHBSA style guide
Conflicts of interest	Clearly state any conflicts of interest on the part of any of the authors. Should there be no conflicts of interest, give a statement to this effect in the manuscript.
Acknowledgements including funding	Acknowledge all funders as appropriate including grant numbers where available.
Ethical clearance/Permissions	Give details of ethical clearance certificates where/if necessary. If ethical clearance was not required, please indicate by 'not applicable'.

f. Risk Assessment & Prevention Research: These describe research initiatives designed to assess health risks and communicable disease receptivity with the aim of providing recommendations for risk mitigation or disease prevention.

Word limit	Risk assessment & prevention research reports should be succinct (aim for no more than 3000 words not including references) and should contain only essential figures and tables.
Summary	Approximately 250 words. Present as one paragraph without headings (unstructured)
Main text	They should be written in the standard format i.e. Summary, Introduction/Background, Methods,

	Results, Discussion & Conclusions, SMART Recommendations, Acknowledgements, References.
References	Include only essential references should be included – preferably no more than 15. Articles should be referenced using Vancouver referencing style, but the journal names should be in italics See the PHBSA style guide and UCT: Vancouver reference style guide https://libguides.lib.uct.ac.za/c.php?g=182394&p=1202253
Tables, figures and graphs	Number all figures and tables clearly, and provide an explanatory legend for each. All figures and tables must be referred to in the text. Figures and tables should not include abbreviations - if they do these should be explained in a footnote. Figures or tables and their accompanying legends should contain sufficient information to enable them to stand alone. See the PHBSA style guide
Formatting requirements	Figures should be included in the text and also sent as a separate file in excel or PowerPoint.1 For graphic files, use Arial font. Legends to figures should appear below each figure. Submit photographs as JPEG files. Submit phylogenetic trees and Spanning trees in PowerPoint (or convert PowerPoint slides into JPEG/TIFF images). Submit map images in JPEG or PowerPoint. Write articles in Microsoft Word (Arial 10) with text single-spaced and fully justified. Leave a space between paragraphs. After a full stop, leave one space before starting the next sentence. Insert figures/tables/pictures into their appropriate places in the text and submit high-resolution figures and pictures as separate files (excel/JPEG/PowerPoint). Italicise (rather than underline) scientific names. See the PHBSA style guide
Conflicts of interest	Clearly state any conflicts of interest on the part of any of the authors. Should there be no conflicts of interest, give a statement to this effect in the manuscript.
Acknowledgements including funding	Acknowledge all funders as appropriate including grant numbers where available.
Ethical clearance/Permissions	Give details of ethical clearance certificates where/if necessary. If ethical clearance was not required, please indicate by 'not applicable'.

g. Policy Briefs

A policy brief is a concise, evidence-based summary of an important public health issue that includes the analysis of alternate potential policy options and evidence-based recommendations on the most feasible option/s to address the issue. Policy briefs are typically written for organisation leaders, policymakers, and those who are responsible for creating and influencing policy. Write policy briefs in a professional style that is easy to understand without specialised knowledge.

Word limit	Policy briefs should be succinct (aim for no more than 3000 words not including references) and should contain only essential figures and tables.
Key messages	Approximately 250 words. Present as one paragraph without headings (unstructured) but follow this basic format. Background, Methods, Rationale and Evidence (one or two main points that support the recommendations), Recommendations, Public health message (implications of the recommendation for public health practice and any call to action for implementation)
Main text	These should include a summary of key messages; essential and appropriate background information identifying the local public health issue, regional/global context/benchmarks if relevant and primary and main modifiable root cause of the problem; detailed analyses of up to three possible solutions that could address the root cause including policy mechanism, implementation, enforcement, implications, feasibility and economic evaluation; and evidence-based recommendations for best policy or practice, and the way forward, Acknowledgements, References. See Appendix 3: Policy Brief Checklist
References	Include only essential references – preferably no more than 10. Articles should be referenced using Vancouver referencing style, but the journal names should be in italics

	Please see the PHBSA style guide and UCT: Vancouver reference style guide at https://libguides.lib.uct.ac.za/c.php?g=182394&p=1202253
Tables, figures and graphs	Number all figures and tables clearly, and provide an explanatory legend for each. All figures and tables must be referred to in the text. Figures and tables should not include abbreviations - if they do these should be explained in a footnote. Figures or tables and their accompanying legends should contain sufficient information to enable them to stand alone. See the PHBSA style guide
Formatting requirements	Figures should be included in the text and also sent as a separate file in excel or PowerPoint.1 For graphic files, use Arial font. Legends to figures should appear below each figure. Submit photographs as JPEG files. Submit phylogenetic trees and Spanning trees in PowerPoint (or convert PowerPoint slides into JPEG/TIFF images). Submit map images in JPEG or PowerPoint. Write articles in Microsoft Word (Arial 10) with text single-spaced and fully justified. Leave a space between paragraphs. After a full stop, leave one space before starting the next sentence. Insert figures/tables/pictures into their appropriate places in the text and submit high-resolution figures and pictures as separate files (excel/JPEG/PowerPoint). Italicise (rather than underline) scientific names. See the PHBSA style guide
Conflicts of interest	Clearly state any conflicts of interest on the part of any of the authors. Should there be no conflicts of interest, give a statement to this effect in the manuscript.
Acknowledgements including funding	Acknowledge all funders as appropriate including grant numbers where available.

h. Rapid Reviews

A rapid review is a form of knowledge synthesis that accelerates the process of conducting a traditional systematic through streamlining or omitting some of the components/methods to produce evidence for stakeholders in a resource-efficient, more timely manner. Rapid reviews often arise from requests by knowledge users including policy-makers who require relevant, contextualised evidence to inform time-sensitive policy and decision-making. As methodology can vary between rapid reviews, authors should be mindful of limitations and potential biases. Clear, transparent reporting of methods is critical. Rapid reviews usually use a descriptive synthesis method rather than quantitative meta-analysis.

Word limit	Rapid Reviews should normally be no longer than 20 000 words (including references but excluding appendices and additional files).
Title	The title should express the review findings and indicate that it is a Rapid Review
Abstract	Approximately 500 words. Present as one paragraph without headings (unstructured) but follow this basic format. Background, Methods (how the review was performed, brief overview of all methodological steps and statistical tests used), Results (review findings, including results of search and assessment of evidence), Conclusions/Recommendations (potential implications for policy/management or research) Do not include references in the abstract Write this section after you have completed the full report.
Main text	This includes Background/Objectives, Methods, Findings/Results and Conclusions/Recommendations as detailed below
Background and Objectives	Background should be written using a professional style that is easy to understand without specialised knowledge.

	<p>Clearly state the background to the review and its aims. Describe the role of stakeholders/knowledge users in the formulation of the question. Provide a clear justification for using a Rapid Review approach, distinguishing the Rapid Review from a Systematic Review. Describe the main (and any secondary) question(s) of the review. This section may also present definitions of the primary question components (e.g. subject, intervention, outcome measures)</p> <p>Provide a brief statement about what is reported in the text.</p>
<p>Methods</p>	<p>Clear and transparent reporting of methods is critical. Describe the design and conduct of the review. Report whether an iterative process was used. If the protocol was made public, published in a journal and/or registered, then provide reference, registration number or link to the protocol. Include the following using subheadings if needed:</p> <p>1.Deviations from the protocol (justify any changes)</p> <p>2.Search for articles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the search strategy, the sources searched and how the search was conducted, including limitations. Describe searches in sufficient detail so as to be replicable. • Include search terms and strings; search limitations (date ranges, languages); search sources; supplementary searches (e.g. snowballing-describe so as to be replicable). • Estimate the comprehensiveness of the search: e.g. a benchmark list of relevant studies compiled to test the sensitivity of your searches. • How were search results combined/de-duplicated? What reference or review management software was used? <p>3.Article screening and study eligibility criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the article screening process and decisions regarding eligibility, at title, abstract, full-text level. Clearly define eligibility criteria (populations, intervention/exposures, comparators, types of study design etc.) • Describe how the consistency of eligibility decisions was measured and reported, and how disagreements between reviewers were resolved • Describe the methods used to critically appraise and assess the validity of included studies; both internal validity (risk of bias) and external validity (generalisability of a study's results to your Rapid Review question). Assess individually for all included studies. Describe how the consistency of critical appraisal decisions was tested. Describe how the results of this assessment were used in synthesis (e.g. subgroup or sensitivity analysis). <p>4.Data coding and extraction strategy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State what categories of data and meta-data were intended to be extracted. • Describe here the methods by which data from each study were extracted and recorded. State how you tested the consistency of data extraction process among reviewers. • Describe any process for obtaining and confirming missing or unclear information or data from studies included in this process.

	<p>5.Data synthesis and presentation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fully explain the methods used to synthesise the extracted data and any subsequent manipulation of the data set (e.g. sub-group analyses). • Include a description of all included studies. If all studies were not selected for further data synthesis (e.g. meta-analysis), explain criteria for selection (e.g. incomplete or missing information, heterogenous outcomes). • If data are appropriate for quantitative synthesis (e.g. meta-analysis), sufficient details should be provided for the synthesis to be replicable. Methods for calculating effect sizes or any other statistical methods for combining data from individual studies, and exploration of heterogeneity and publication bias should be described. <p>6. Knowledge user involvement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe what knowledge users (eg, policymakers, patients, guideline developers, clinicians) were involved in the development of the Rapid Review, specifying the stage(s) and the nature of involvement.
Findings/Results	<p>Search results: Report the number of articles and studies therein found in the search. Include a flow diagram showing all stages of the inclusion/exclusion process, from search results to full text eligibility. Include descriptive statistics on any relevant information regarding the distribution of articles found (e.g. geographical, temporal) to assess potential gaps or bias in the evidence.</p> <p>Narrative synthesis including study validity assessment</p> <p>A narrative synthesis of all eligible studies should be provided (usually as text, supported by tables/figures). PICO or another method can be used to frame results. Results of any statistical syntheses should be fully reported with appropriate statistical values.</p> <p>For each and all studies provide a summary of validity assessments as a table and clarify which of the eligible studies were included in/excluded from quantitative (or other types of) synthesis and provide reasons for these decisions.</p> <p>Data synthesis: Report results of any synthesis of extracted data e.g. meta-analyses. Include effect sizes, tests for heterogeneity etc.</p> <p>Review limitations: Include a detailed discussion of the limitations of the review, including limitations of the review methods, as well as limitations of the evidence base (underlying bias within the studies found such as baseline bias and confounding variables). Highlight any gaps in the primary studies/available literature.</p>

Conclusions/Recommendations	<p><u>Implications for Policy/Management</u> Based on the evidence, outline the recommendations made in relation to the review question. Include any measure of the uncertainty surrounding the outcome. Keep it short and understandable to those not expert in the subject.</p> <p><u>and/or</u></p> <p><u>Implications for Research</u> Summarise the limitations/weaknesses of the current evidence base in terms of knowledge gaps and the need for further primary research. Recommend future study questions and designs that would improve the evidence base as justified by the review findings.</p>
References	Include all references quoted in the final report
Tables, Figure and Graphs	<p>Number all figures and tables clearly, and provide an explanatory legend for each. All figures and tables must be referred to in the text. Figures and tables should not include abbreviations - if they do these should be explained in a footnote. Figures or tables and their accompanying legends should contain sufficient information to enable them to stand alone.</p> <p>See the PHBSA style guide</p>
Formatting requirements	<p>Figures should be included in the text and also sent as a separate file in excel or PowerPoint.1 For graphic files, use Arial font. Legends to figures should appear below each figure. Submit photographs as JPEG files. Submit phylogenetic trees and Spanning trees in PowerPoint (or convert PowerPoint slides into JPEG/TIFF images). Submit map images in JPEG or PowerPoint.</p> <p>Write articles in Microsoft Word (Arial 10) with text single-spaced and fully justified. Leave a space between paragraphs. After a full stop, leave one space before starting the next sentence. Insert figures/tables/pictures into their appropriate places in the text and submit high-resolution figures and pictures as separate files (excel/JPEG/PowerPoint). Italicise (rather than underline) scientific names.</p> <p>See the PHBSA style guide</p>
Conflicts of Interest	Clearly state any conflicts of interest on the part of any of the authors. Should there be no conflicts of interest, give a statement to this effect in the manuscript.
Acknowledgements including funding	Acknowledge all funders as appropriate including grant numbers where available.
Appendices	<p>May include:</p> <p>The full search strategy for at least one database</p> <p>Critical Appraisal Outcome Tool is appended.</p> <p>Completed data extraction table(s) etc.</p>
<p>Environmental evidence Journal. Biomedical Central. Rapid Reviews. Available at: https://environmentalevidencejournal.biomedcentral.com/submission-guidelines/preparing-your-manuscript/rapid-review</p> <p>Dobbins (2017). Rapid Review Guidebook. Steps for Conducting a Rapid Review. National Collaborating Centre for Methods and Tools. Available at: http://www.nccmt.ca/resources/rapid-review-guidebook</p>	

A Rapid Review can be guided by the PICOT Criteria or the FINER Criteria.

The PICOT Criteria*

P	Population (patients)	What specific patient population are you interested in?
I	Intervention (for intervention studies only)	What is your investigational intervention?
C	Comparison group	What is the main alternative to compare with the intervention?
O	Outcome of interest	What do you intend to accomplish, measure, improve or affect?
T	Time	What is the appropriate follow-up time to assess outcome?
*Some authors add elements for setting and study design		

The FINER Criteria:

F	Feasible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate number of subjects • Adequate technical expertise • Affordable in time and money • Manageable in scope
I	Interesting	Getting the answer intrigues the investigator, peers and community
N	Novel	Confirms, refutes or extends previous findings
E	Ethical	Amenable to a study that International Review Board will approve
R	Relevant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To scientific knowledge • To clinical and health policy • To future research

Sources:

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The order of authors should be decided jointly by all co-authors. If two authors contributed equally to a report in a major role, they can indicate dual first or last authorship.

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References/source documents

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1: Format of a Surveillance report

Surveillance reports follow the general IMRAD (Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion, Conclusions & recommendations) format with some additional elements specific to surveillance reports

Medical or public health professionals without special knowledge of the subject should be able to understand the report.

Abstract/summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum of 250 words. Write after completing the report • Include the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Problem or condition Time period the report covers Description of the surveillance system Key results Conclusions Recommendations for public health actions
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives the rationale (objectives) for the surveillance of the disease or condition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Background statistics that cover relevant facts about incidence, prevalence, mortality, morbidity, potential to cause outbreaks or epidemics, burden to medical system, etc. This information is compiled through a literature review • Describes the area or district/department where the surveillance analysis was carried out: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Population under surveillance and key data about the area/region and the environment (depending on the disease under surveillance) • Describes current efforts to control the disease or condition • Describes value of the surveillance system in combating the disease or condition
Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the data sources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include the distribution of the population by age, sex and location, for subsequent calculation of rates • State the definition of health events • Describe database cleaning and the process to confirm that the variables are appropriately coded and categorized • Describe the statistical methods used (descriptive and analytic) • Describe the surveillance data collection instruments and variables used
Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clinical features, e.g., common symptoms, percent hospitalized or died, laboratory results such as percent confirmed • Time, e.g., by year, month, week or other appropriate interval to show patterns or changes over time • Place, e.g., by geographic area • Person, e.g., by age group, sex and other relevant characteristics • Other salient results
Discussion, conclusions & recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is based on the results • Interprets the observed patterns to identify problems or areas that require further epidemiologic investigation or public health action. Patterns include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Short- and long-term trends Place and person characteristics • Includes limitations • Considers important public health actions • Remember: Give SMART recommendations for <i>modifiable</i> risk factors <p>Example: risk of obesity increases with age: Cannot modify age, can increase physical activity or improve diet among older people</p>
Other components of a surveillance report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include other components such as Author affiliations, Acknowledgements, Permissions, Conflicts of interest, References, etc.

Appendix 2: Format of an Outbreak report

Outbreak reports follow the general IMRAD format with some additional elements specific to surveillance reports

Summary	<p>Include the following components (unstructured): Background, Aim/objectives, Methods, Results/Key findings Conclusion/Recommendations/Public Health message</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One to three sentences establishing the existence of the outbreak or underlying public health problem • Statement that an investigation was conducted, when, and by whom • Key findings • Actions taken to contain the outbreak • Statement of the public health implications and actions to take in response to the investigation. For some reports, authors may include existing consensus recommendations
Introduction (include aim)	<p>Pertinent background information concerning the disease/syndrome, pathology, occurrence in South Africa, geospatial occurrence, outbreak thresholds etc. State the aim/objectives of the investigation</p>
Investigation / Methods	<p>Present the initial investigation. This could include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A description of the setting and a statement of how the outbreak came to the attention of health authorities • A clinical description of the index case or initial cases • Initial key test results • Hypothesis generation and results <p>Summarize the full investigation, including the case definition, case-finding activities, method of investigation. Present the methods of any analytic studies (e.g., cohort or case-control studies), laboratory testing including whole genome sequencing. Separate sections for Epidemiologic Investigation, Environmental Health Investigation, and Laboratory Investigation, might be used</p>
Results	<p>Summarise the results:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe cases by occurrence, clinical characteristics, treatment, and outcome, as well as by time, place, and person, if applicable. Describe epidemiologic timelines and any trends. Describe the public health impact • Include the results of any analytic studies (e.g., cohort or case-control studies) • Provide the results of any relevant microbiological, genetic, or toxicological results, or any testing of environmental samples
Public Health Response	<p>When appropriate, include a labeled Public Health Response section that provides a brief description summarising any public health interventions taken and the results of the interventions</p>
Discussion/Conclusions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow this general format: Begin by stating the conclusions of the report, interpreting the results, conveying their public health meaning, and placing the results into context by citing comparative or corroborative studies • A limitations paragraph might not be necessary for an Outbreak Report
SMART recommendations	<p>Conclude with labeled Implications for Public Health Practice, lessons learned and recommendations for best practice, and any recommendations for prevention and control, including a specific call to action when possible</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Base primary recommendations on the analysis presented in the report • Cite broader public health guidance that is current and related to the report topic in this section. Describe the source of the guidance in the report and include a reference • When appropriate, include specific examples of successful public health interventions
Other components	<p>Include other components such as Author affiliations, Acknowledgements including funders, Permissions/ethics approvals, Conflicts of interest, References</p>
<p>SOURCE: MMWR author guidelines</p>	

Appendix 3: Policy brief checklist

Component	Criteria
Title Title	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short: 15 words or less • Attention-getting/memorable • Uses accurate and unbiased language
Key messages Are the problem and recommendations clear?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appears on the first page • Short: limited to one paragraph or bulleted list • Concise: clearly distils the essence of the brief • Compelling: motivates readers to keep reading
Problem statement Will the reader agree that the identified problem is both important and requires urgent action?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly identifies the problem/issue • Identifies the primary cause and main modifiable root cause • Describes the local situation • Specifies which population groups are affected and how • Quantifies the burden of the problem and the impact on public health • Summarises the relevant data, presenting it visually • Describes previous efforts to address the issue • Describes the problem from a global/regional perspective, if relevant
Policy options Will the reader be convinced that one or more solutions represent the best path forward?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presents and analyses up to three potential solutions addressing the root cause • Describes supporting evidence for options • Clearly describes policy options with sufficient detail (policy mechanism, implementation and enforcement) • Evaluates options thoroughly across relevant criteria, including differential impact on population groups
Recommendations/Action steps Do the recommendations outline clear action steps?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presents at least one recommendation, with next steps • Recommendations are evidence-informed/well supported
References/Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes a reasonable number of resources • Includes local data resources • Resources are relevant and reflect diverse perspectives
Design and Readability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing is clear and compelling • Text is easily understood by non-scientific audience • Appropriate use of graphs, maps, images • Preferably no more than 2000 words as a guide
Remember to include:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledgements • Funding • (Ethical Considerations- if using primary data) • Conflicts of Interest • References
SOURCE: CDC Foundation. Policy Checklist. Data to Policy workshop, South Africa. 2024 March	

Appendix 4: PHBSA Author submission checklist:

Corresponding Author:

Date:

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The corresponding author is the primary contact for approving the report prior to publication, as well as reviewing and responding to the comments in the edited drafts and proofs provided by the PHBSA editors		