

Policy change for withdrawing published Cochrane Reviews

The policy for withdrawing published Cochrane Reviews was updated on 19 August 2019.

What has been updated?

Cochrane's policy on [withdrawing published Cochrane Reviews](#) has been updated and now makes it clear that Cochrane Reviews should be withdrawn only in exceptional circumstances, for example, if there is a concern about the conduct or reporting of the Cochrane Review. These include: serious error (s) in the review; confirmed serious error as a direct result of the retraction of an included study; scientific misconduct in the review; or a serious breach of Cochrane's conflict of interest policy.

Protocols for Cochrane Reviews may be withdrawn for the above reasons or because it is out of date, new authors are needed to progress the protocol and review, or because the protocol has been split into or merged with other protocols.

Why was the policy changed?

The previous version of the policy allowed for published Cochrane Reviews to be withdrawn for many different reasons, ranging from the review being split into two or more reviews, to notifying that the review is being updated, and to investigate errors in the review. Reflecting on these reasons and the fact that each withdrawal generates a new citation (and therefore a new entry in PubMed, for example), it became clear that we needed to restrict the use of withdrawal for particular reasons and only as an exception. There are other approaches that editorial teams can use to manage situations not covered by the new policy, such as the [Updating Classification System](#) that is being rolled out.

The updated policy has a complementary section on editorial management of withdrawing published Cochrane Reviews, which includes both the [new steps to follow](#) and information about the [display](#) of published withdrawn Cochrane Reviews.

What does this mean for editorial teams?

Editorial teams need to be familiar with the updated policy and when to use the withdrawn status for Cochrane Reviews. There is a [new section in the EPPR specifically for editorial teams](#). A key change in this section is that there are now five steps that must be followed when considering withdrawing a Cochrane Review: (1) notify authors; (2) draft the withdrawn statement; (3) approval from Network Senior Editor; and (4) notify the Editorial & Methods Department; and (5) withdraw the review.

All five steps apply for Cochrane Reviews and protocols for Cochrane Reviews, although editorial teams can apply only steps 1, 2, and 5 if a protocol is withdrawn because it is out of date, new authors are needed, or because the protocol has been split into or merged with other protocols.

What does this mean for authors?

Authors should be familiar with the new policy and understand the reasons for withdrawing Cochrane Reviews. As set out in the [steps for withdrawing a published Cochrane Review](#), the author team (via the contact author and copied to all co-authors) will be notified of the intention to withdraw the Cochrane Review – and be given the opportunity for discussion (unless authors are not contactable) before proceeding with publication of the withdrawn statement.

Where can I find more information?

There are three sections of the [Cochrane Editorial and Publishing Policy Resource](#) relevant to withdrawing published Cochrane Reviews, and these should be checked for the latest updates:

- [Policy](#)
- [Steps to withdraw a Cochrane Review](#) (for editorial teams)
- [Display of published withdrawn articles](#).

The policy also includes additional information about [withdrawing protocols for Cochrane Reviews](#).