

## PEER REVIEW POLICY

Aligned with COPE Guidelines, ICMJE Recommendations & PMDC Recognition Standards

ISSN: 2789-1151 (Online) | ISSN: 2789-1143 (Print) | Effective: 2025 | Version 1.0

### 1. TYPE OF PEER REVIEW

JBIHS employs a double-blind peer review system for all submitted manuscripts, in which the identities of both authors and reviewers are concealed from each other throughout the entire review process. This approach is adopted to ensure objective, unbiased, and fair evaluation of manuscripts solely on the basis of their scientific merit and quality.

#### Review Model: Double-Blind Peer Review

Authors do not know who reviewed their manuscript.

Reviewers do not know who authored the manuscript.

Editorials and invited commentaries are exempt from peer review.

This model is consistent with PMDC recognition requirements for health sciences journals in Pakistan and aligns with COPE's best practice guidelines for peer review processes.

### 2. REVIEWER SELECTION

#### 2.1 Criteria for Selection

Reviewers are selected by the Editor-in-Chief or a designated Associate Editor on the basis of:

- Subject expertise directly relevant to the manuscript's topic and methodology
- Active publication record in a peer-reviewed journal within the relevant field
- Absence of any known conflict of interest with the manuscript or its authors
- Availability to complete the review within the stipulated timeframe

#### 2.2 Reviewer Database

The editorial office maintains a database of qualified national and international reviewers across all disciplines covered by JBIHS. Editors may also seek recommendations from Editorial Board members or consult publicly available reviewer registries for specialised topics.

#### 2.3 Number of Reviewers

Each manuscript is reviewed by a minimum of two independent reviewers. In cases of significant disagreement between reviewers, a third reviewer may be invited to provide an additional independent opinion to assist the Editor-in-Chief in reaching a final decision.

#### 2.4 Reviewer Conflicts of Interest

Potential reviewers must declare any conflict of interest before accepting a review invitation. Conflicts include, but are not limited to, prior collaboration with an author, institutional affiliation with the submitting team, financial interest in the subject matter, or personal relationships that may affect objectivity. Any reviewer with a conflict of interest must decline the invitation.

### 3. REVIEW PROCESS

The JBIHS peer review process follows these sequential stages:

#	Stage	Description	Timeframe
1	Submission	Author submits manuscript via journal system with all required documents	Day 0
2	Initial Editorial Screening	Editor checks scope, format, completeness, and plagiarism (Turnitin)	Within 7 working days
3	Reviewer Assignment	Editor-in-Chief assigns at least two independent reviewers	Within 10 working days
4	Peer Review	Double-blind review by minimum two subject experts	3–4 weeks
5	Editorial Decision	Editor-in-Chief consolidates comments and issues decision	Within 7 days of final review
6	Revision (if required)	Authors revise and submit point-by-point response	As specified (typically 2–4 weeks)
7	Re-review / Final Decision	Revised manuscript checked; final acceptance or rejection issued	1–2 weeks
8	Acceptance & Production	Accepted manuscript processed for copy-editing and typesetting	2–4 weeks
9	Publication	Article published online; assigned DOI and issue placement	As per publication schedule

#### 4. INITIAL EDITORIAL SCREENING

All manuscripts undergo an initial editorial screening before being sent for peer review. Manuscripts may be rejected at this stage without peer review if they:

- Fall outside the scope of JBIHS
- Do not comply with submission formatting requirements
- Lack ethical approval documentation where required
- Exceed the HEC-mandated plagiarism similarity threshold (overall >19%)
- Are incomplete (missing authorship form, cover letter, or required checklist)
- Show evidence of duplicate submission or prior publication without disclosure

Authors will be notified of a desk rejection with a brief explanation within 7 working days of submission.

#### 5. EDITORIAL DECISIONS

Following peer review, the Editor-in-Chief consolidates reviewers' comments and makes one of the following decisions:

Decision	Meaning	Next Step
Accept as is	Manuscript meets all requirements; no changes needed	Proceeds directly to production
Minor Revision	Small changes required; re-review may not be needed	Author revises; editor reviews
Major Revision	Substantial changes required; full re-review by reviewer(s)	Author revises; returns to reviewers

<b>Reject with Resubmission</b>	Fundamental issues but topic has merit; new submission allowed	Authors may resubmit as new
<b>Reject</b>	Does not meet journal standards; resubmission not invited	No further consideration

All decisions are communicated to the corresponding author in writing, together with reviewers' comments (anonymised). The Editor-in-Chief's decision is based on reviewers' recommendations but is not bound by them — the final decision rests solely with the Editor-in-Chief.

## 6. REVISION PROCESS

### 6.1 Submitting a Revision

Authors invited to revise their manuscript must submit the following:

- A revised manuscript with all changes clearly highlighted or tracked
- A point-by-point response letter addressing each reviewer and editor comment individually

### 6.2 Revision Deadlines

Minor revisions should be returned within 2 weeks. Major revisions should be returned within 4 weeks. Authors who require additional time must notify the editorial office before the deadline. Manuscripts not returned within 8 weeks without communication will be treated as withdrawn.

### 6.3 Re-Review

Revised manuscripts submitted in response to major revision decisions will ordinarily be returned to the original reviewer(s) for re-assessment. The reviewer will confirm whether their concerns have been adequately addressed. The Editor-in-Chief makes the final acceptance or rejection decision after re-review.

## 7. REVIEW TIMELINES

### Target Timelines

Submission to first editorial decision (desk accept/reject): Within 7 working days

Submission to first peer review decision: 4–6 weeks

Submission to final acceptance (including revisions): 8–12 weeks

Acceptance to online publication: 2–4 weeks

These timelines are targets and may vary depending on reviewer availability, complexity of the manuscript, and speed of author response. Authors will be kept informed of any delays.

## 8. REVIEWER OBLIGATIONS & ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES

### 8.1 Conduct

Reviewers are expected to uphold the following standards in accordance with COPE's Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers:

- Provide objective, constructive, and evidence-based feedback that helps authors improve their work, regardless of whether the manuscript is recommended for acceptance or rejection.
- Complete reviews within the agreed timeframe, or notify the editorial office promptly if unable to do so, suggesting an alternative reviewer if possible.
- Declare any conflict of interest before accepting or during a review assignment, and recuse themselves if a conflict is identified.
- Maintain strict confidentiality of the manuscript content, findings, and identity of authors at all times.

- Alert the editor to any suspected ethical concerns, including plagiarism, duplicate submission, or data fabrication.

## 8.2 Prohibitions

**Reviewers Must Not:** *contact authors directly; use or disclose unpublished data, ideas, or findings from reviewed manuscripts; share the manuscript with colleagues without prior editor approval; use AI tools to conduct the review without disclosure; or submit the manuscript or its content elsewhere.*

## 9. CONFIDENTIALITY

All manuscripts received by JBIHS are treated as confidential documents from the point of submission until publication. Reviewers, editors, and editorial staff must not disclose the content, existence, or outcome of any manuscript under review to any third party. This obligation continues after the review process is concluded, whether or not the manuscript is ultimately published.

Any breach of confidentiality by a reviewer or editorial team member will be treated as a serious ethical violation and handled in accordance with COPE guidelines.

## 10. APPEALS AGAINST EDITORIAL DECISIONS

Authors who believe that a manuscript has been rejected in error, or that the peer review process was flawed, may submit a formal written appeal to the Editor-in-Chief within 14 calendar days of receiving the decision. The appeal must:

- Clearly state the grounds for appeal with specific reference to the reviewers' comments or editorial decision
- Provide a point-by-point scientific rebuttal of the concerns raised
- Include any new evidence or clarifications that were not present in the original submission

Appeals are reviewed by the Editor-in-Chief together with an independent editorial board member who was not involved in the original decision. The outcome of the appeal is final. Appeals based solely on disagreement with the decision, without new scientific evidence or procedural grounds, will not be entertained.

**Note:** *Submitting a revised manuscript does not constitute an appeal. If authors wish to contest a rejection, they must submit a formal written appeal as described above before resubmitting.*

## 11. REVIEWER RECOGNITION

JBIHS recognises and values the contribution of peer reviewers to the quality of published research. Reviewers who complete reviews in a timely and constructive manner will be acknowledged in the annual reviewer recognition listing published on the JBIHS website (with consent). Reviewers may also receive a formal certificate of review upon request.

## 12. POLICY REVIEW

This Peer Review Policy will be reviewed at minimum every two years, or sooner in response to updates in COPE guidelines, PMDC recognition criteria, or ICMJE recommendations. The current version will be available on the JBIHS website. Reviewers and authors are advised to consult the current version before engaging with the review process.