#### Item 6: ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA.

Specify study characteristics (e.g., PICOS, length of follow-up) and report characteristics (e.g., years considered, language, publication status) used as criteria for eligibility, giving rationale.

**Examples.** Types of studies: “Randomised clinical trials studying the administration of hepatitis B vaccine to CRF [chronic renal failure] patients, with or without dialysis. No language, publication date, or publication status restrictions were imposed…”

Types of participants: “Participants of any age with CRF or receiving dialysis (haemodialysis or peritoneal dialysis) were considered. CRF was defined as serum creatinine greater than 200 µmol/L for a period of more than six months or individuals receiving dialysis (haemodialysis or peritoneal dialysis)…Renal transplant patients were excluded from this review as these individuals are immunosuppressed and are receiving immunosuppressant agents to prevent rejection of their transplanted organs, and they have essentially normal renal function…”

Types of intervention: “Trials comparing the beneficial and harmful effects of hepatitis B vaccines with adjuvant or cytokine co-interventions [and] trials comparing the beneficial and harmful effects of immunoglobulin prophylaxis. This review was limited to studies looking at active immunization. Hepatitis B vaccines (plasma or recombinant (yeast) derived) of all types, dose, and regimens versus placebo, control vaccine, or no vaccine…”

Types of outcome measures: “Primary outcome measures: Seroconversion, ie, proportion of patients with adequate anti-HBs response (>10 IU/L or Sample Ratio Units). Hepatitis B infections (as measured by hepatitis B core antigen (HBcAg) positivity or persistent HBsAg positivity), both acute and chronic. Acute (primary) HBV [hepatitis B virus] infections were defined as seroconversion to HBsAg positivity or development of IgM anti-HBc. Chronic HBV infections were defined as the persistence of HBsAg for more than six months or HBsAg positivity and liver biopsy compatible with a diagnosis or chronic hepatitis B. Secondary outcome measures: Adverse events of hepatitis B vaccinations…[and]…mortality.”

#### Explanation.

Knowledge of the eligibility criteria is essential in appraising the validity, applicability, and comprehensiveness of a review. Thus, authors should unambiguously specify eligibility criteria used in the review. Carefully defined eligibility criteria inform various steps of the review methodology. They influence the development of the search strategy and serve to ensure that studies are selected in a systematic and unbiased manner.

A study may be described in multiple reports, and one report may describe multiple studies. Therefore, we separate eligibility criteria into the following two components: study characteristics and report characteristics. Both need to be reported. Study eligibility criteria are likely to include the populations, interventions, comparators, outcomes, and study designs of interest (PICOS; see [Box 2](http://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1000100#pmed-1000100-box002)), as well as other study-specific elements, such as specifying a minimum length of follow-up. Authors should state whether studies will be excluded because they do not include (or report) specific outcomes to help readers ascertain whether the systematic review may be biased as a consequence of selective reporting.

Report eligibility criteria are likely to include language of publication, publication status (e.g., inclusion of unpublished material and abstracts), and year of publication. Inclusion or not of non-English language literature , unpublished data, or older data can influence the effect estimates in meta-analyses. Caution may need to be exercised in including all identified studies due to potential differences in the risk of bias such as, for example, selective reporting in abstracts .