Step 1. The research questions, inclusion/exclusion criteria and key words for literature search are clearly defined by the Question Leaders (QLs) in collaboration with the Central Coordination Group (CCG).

Step 2. The literature search is conducted and the selection is independently made by 2 QLs, based on the abstracts blinded for author and journal.

3 categories of selection: Yes, No, Appropriate editorial or review article. Abstracts are rejected only if rejected by both QLs.

Step 3. Blinded articles* of abstracts selected in Step 2 are retrieved by the CCG and read by the 2 QLs for inclusion. In the case of disagreement between the two readers, a consensus opinion is reached. QLs pearl the reference lists of selected articles to identify additional potentially relevant articles. Articles are classified as editorials or review articles, original studies to be included in the quality assessment process, and those to be excluded.

Step 4. Pearled articles* from Step 3, above, are read by the 2 QLs for their inclusion as review articles, editorials, background articles or as original studies to be forwarded for quality assessment.

Step 5. Quality assessment and data abstraction is done for the blinded articles* of all selected original studies.

* Articles were blinded for author(s), abstract, journal, sponsors and acknowledgements.