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Centre for
Evidence-based
Veterinary Medicine

at the University of Nottingham

About VetSRev

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VetSRev (<https://vetsrev.nottingham.ac.uk/>) is a freely available public database of citations for systematic reviews of relevance to veterinary medicine and science. It is produced by the [Centre for Evidence-based Veterinary Medicine](#) (CEVM) at the University of Nottingham.

The systematic reviews in VetSRev are found by searches of the **PubMed** and **CAB Abstracts** databases using specialised search filters, as well as through alerts and contact with systematic review authors. If you think we have missed a relevant systematic review, or have any other query, please e-mail us at cevm@nottingham.ac.uk.

We would like to acknowledge the kind co-operation of the U.S. National Library of Medicine and CABI for allowing us to use citations and indexing terms derived from PubMed and CAB Abstracts.

What are systematic reviews, and why use them?

Systematic reviews attempt to identify and evaluate all the evidence that meets pre-specified criteria to answer a given research question.

High quality systematic reviews aim to minimise [bias](#) by using explicit, systematic methods, including a comprehensive and documented search strategy to identify studies for inclusion. It is widely accepted that a well-conducted and up-to-date systematic review provides the most reliable evidence, especially for health interventions.

A systematic review may include a **meta-analysis**, where the results of individual studies are combined statistically to give a pooled estimate of the outcome of interest. However, a meta-analysis may not be appropriate, for example if the studies analysed are not similar enough or if the quality of the studies is poor.

Systematic reviews are different from **narrative reviews**, which describe the literature on a topic but lack an explicit methodology. This means there is more [risk of bias](#) in the selection of evidence in the review, and the conclusions reached, compared to a well-conducted systematic review.

For more information on systematic reviews, please see the [CEVM website](#).

Inclusion and exclusion criteria for the VetSRev database

Not all systematic reviews have been carried out in the same way, so the CEVM needed to set some ground rules on what to include and what to exclude in the VetSRev database, as set out below.

Minimum criteria for inclusion as a systematic review:

1. The search methods for the review should be described in a **Methods or Results section (or supplemental materials)**, not just a mention of a database search in the abstract,

AND

2. The **database(s) searched** for the review should be named.

Topic inclusion and exclusion criteria:

- Systematic reviews are included if they are considered by the VetSRev team to be relevant to **veterinary medicine, veterinary science, animal health, animal reproduction or animal nutrition**;
- Systematic reviews on **animal-assisted therapy** are included;
- Systematic reviews of **animal models of human disease** are excluded unless the results are judged to be directly relevant to veterinary medicine.

Other inclusion and exclusion criteria:

- **Meta-analyses** are included in VetSRev if the studies analysed were found by a systematic search of the literature, with details of the search methodology, including the names of databases searched.
- **Conference papers** about systematic reviews are included if they are full papers with sufficient details of the methodology to meet the above criteria. Conference abstracts are excluded. If a conference paper has also been published as a refereed journal paper, the refereed journal paper is used in the database and not the conference paper.
- **Non-English language systematic reviews** are included if there is an abstract available in English.
- In some cases it can be hard to draw the line between a narrative review and a systematic review. Some reviews describe themselves as systematic reviews but lack information on the methods used to find the included studies, so have been omitted from VetSRev. Other reviews use and describe systematic methods but are not named as systematic reviews, making them difficult to identify except with

specialised search strategies or filters; we include such reviews in VetSRev if we find them.

Quality of systematic reviews in VetSRev

Systematic reviews vary in the quality of their methods and reporting. The inclusion criteria for systematic reviews in VetSRev focus on description of the search methods, but there are other aspects of quality to consider.

We have not formally assessed the quality of the systematic reviews in VetSRev. We therefore recommend that you carry out a [critical appraisal](#) to identify quality issues for any systematic review that you are considering applying in practice.

Aspects of quality to consider include:

- Was there a clearly focused question?
- How thorough was the search?
- Were the search terms used appropriate?
- Were there attempts to identify unpublished studies?
- Were the criteria for inclusion and exclusion of studies appropriate and clearly stated?
- What methods were used to select and appraise the studies included in the review?
- Was there an assessment of potential sources of bias?

We recommend the [AMSTAR 2](#) critical appraisal checklist, which has been extensively tested and validated, and is easy to use.

Critical appraisal sheets for systematic reviews are also available from the [Centre for Evidence-Based Medicine](#), from the [Centre for Evidence-based Veterinary Medicine](#) and from the [CASP Critical Appraisal Skills Programme](#).

If you have any questions about VetSRev or systematic reviews please contact the VetSRev team (Lisa Morrow and Marnie Brennan) at: cevm@nottingham.ac.uk.