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Rotating the CI/CD Group Access Token

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The group access token used by the pipelines expires periodically. Only `GITLAB_ACCESS_TOKEN` needs rotating — `RENOVATE_TOKEN` holds `$GITLAB_ACCESS_TOKEN` as a reference and resolves automatically, so leave it untouched.

IMPORTANT	**Use Rotate, not revoke-and-create.** Rotating keeps the same bot user; a new token makes Renovate recreate dependency dashboards and reopen closed MRs.

WARNING	**Rotating revokes the old token immediately.** Pause pipeline schedules first and keep the new token in a password manager — variables have no rollback.

1. Note the current settings

Group > **Settings > CI/CD** > expand **Variables** > `GITLAB_ACCESS_TOKEN`. It is **Masked and hidden**, so the value cannot be edited — it must be deleted and recreated. Screenshot the row; the expected state is type **Variable**, **Masked and hidden**, **Protected**, environment scope **All**.

2. Rotate

Group > **Settings > Access tokens** > **Rotate**. Copy the new value, which is shown only once.

3. Recreate the variable

Delete `GITLAB_ACCESS_TOKEN`, then choose **Add variable** and set:

Key
: `GITLAB_ACCESS_TOKEN`, exactly — a typo creates a variable that nothing reads.

Value
: The new token.

Visibility
: **Masked and hidden**.

Protect variable
: On.

CAUTION	Both of the last two settings default to the wrong value. **Visibility** defaults to **Masked** and can only be set while the variable is being created, with no way to correct it afterwards. **Protect variable** defaults to off; if that is missed, the token is exposed to pipelines on any unprotected branch.

The environment scope cannot be set while a group variable is being added. If the first step showed anything other than **All**, select the edit (pencil) icon next to the variable and set it now.

4. Verify

Run a pipeline on a **protected** branch; a protected variable is absent on unprotected branches, which is expected. Unpause the schedules and check Renovate. If a project defines its own `GITLAB_ACCESS_TOKEN`, that value overrides the group one and the project stays broken.

A missing or mistyped variable expands to an **empty string**, so it surfaces as a confusing `401` rather than as a configuration error.