

Medical Laboratory Assistant

Draw blood, label and prepare samples, keep the lab moving. About a year of college and you are working in a hospital.

TYPICAL PAY

\$56,000

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$40k to \$75k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

1 year

after high school

DEMAND

Good

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Hospital labs, private labs, blood collection clinics, clinics

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grade 12
 Grade 12 biology and chemistry help. Most programs ask for a high school diploma and a science credit.
- 2 College certificate** 8 to 12 months
 Usually 8 months to a year. Phlebotomy (drawing blood), specimen handling, basic lab tests, ECGs (heart tracings), safety and patient care. NAIT (Northern Alberta Institute of Technology), Mohawk, Fanshawe and many other colleges offer it.
- 3 Clinical placement** 5 to 8 weeks
 Several weeks in a real lab or collection clinic. NAIT's is 7 weeks. Unpaid, and often where you get your first job offer.
- 4 CSMLS (Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science) exam** After graduation
 The national certification exam, written four times a year. Not legally required, but most hospitals ask for it.

Pros and cons

- + Working in health care within about a year
- + Cheap training and real demand at hospitals
- + A stepping stone to the technologist job
- Modest pay, especially at private clinics
- Early mornings, and shift work in hospitals
- Repetitive, on your feet all day

Good to know

Phlebotomy is Greek for cutting a vein

The word comes from the ancient Greek for vein and cutting. For centuries doctors bled patients on purpose as a treatment. Today the assistant with the needle takes a few tubes and the treatment come...

The cap colour is a code

Each blood tube has a coloured cap that tells the lab what chemical is inside: lavender for cell counts, red or gold for chemistry, blue for clotting tests. Drawing tubes in the wrong order can spoil a result.

Optional boosts

Medical laboratory technologist. Lead or charge assistant. Mobile and home collection. Specialized collection.

Where these numbers come from

Job Bank: Medical laboratory assistants, wages (updated Aug 2026)
 CSMLS (Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science): exam dates and fees
 CSMLS: About medical laboratory assistants
 NAIT (Northern Alberta Institute of Technology): Medical Laboratory Assisting

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in Canadian dollars, based on Government of Canada Job Bank wage data and published salary grids. They vary by province, employer and experience. Tuition is for domestic students. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/ca/careers/medical-laboratory-assistant>



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