

Pathologist

The doctor who looks at tissue under a microscope and says what the disease is. Every cancer diagnosis passes through one. Five years of residency, regular hours.

TYPICAL PAY

\$370,000

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$250k to \$500k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

11 to 13 years

after high school

DEMAND

Very high

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Hospital laboratories, regional lab centres, cancer centres, forensic...

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 11 and 12
Top marks in biology, chemistry, math and English. You need a very high average for a science undergrad.
- 2 Bachelor's degree** 3 to 4 years
Any major works. Keep a GPA (grade point average) above 3.8, volunteer, do research. Write the MCAT (medical school admission test).
- 3 Medical school, the MD (doctor of medicine)** 3 to 4 years
Acceptance rates are 5% to 15%. Classes, then clinical rotations. Few students see pathology unless they seek it out, so do an elective.
- 4 Anatomical or general pathology residency** 5 years
Matched through CaRMS (the residency matching service). Surgical specimens, biopsies, autopsies, cytology and, for general pathology, the blood and chemistry lab too.
- 5 Certification and licence** End of residency
Pass the Royal College exam to become FRCPC (Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians of Canada), then register with your provincial College of Physicians and Surgeons.

Pros and cons

- + Regular hours, salaried, pension, real vacations
- + Your diagnosis decides the treatment for every cancer patient
- + Deep science, and the field is being transformed by genetics and AI
- Little contact with patients, and no thanks from them
- Long hours at a microscope are hard on eyes, neck and back
- The pressure of being the final word, with no second chance

Good to know

Every cancer is diagnosed by a pathologist

A scan can suggest cancer. Only a pathologist looking at the cells can confirm it, name the type, and grade how aggressive it is. No oncologist starts chemotherapy without that report.

A Canadian pioneer

Maude Abbott, a McGill pathologist born in 1869, wrote the first great atlas of congenital heart disease. She was one of the first women to practise medicine in Canada and had to fight to be allowed to study it.

Optional boosts

Forensic pathology. Dermatopathology, gastrointestinal, breast or gynecologic pathology. Hematopathology. Molecular pathology.

Where these numbers come from

Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada
CIHI: A profile of physicians in Canada, 2024 (payments)
CaRMS: the residency match
AFMC: Canadian medical schools

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/pathologist>



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