

Respiratory Therapist

Run ventilators, manage airways and keep people breathing in intensive care. Three years of college, then shift work.

TYPICAL PAY

\$82,000

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$65k to \$100k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

3 to 4 years

after high school

DEMAND

Good

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Hospital intensive care, emergency, neonatal units, home...

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 11 and 12
 Grade 12 biology, chemistry, physics and math. Most programs want all four.
- 2 Respiratory therapy program** 3 years
 A 3-year college advanced diploma, or a degree at a few universities. Years 1 and 2 are classroom and lab. Year 3 is full-time clinical placement in hospitals, unpaid.
- 3 Write the CBRC (Canadian Board for Respiratory Care) exam** After graduation
 The national certification exam. The board recently renamed itself Health Professionals Testing Canada, but the exam still goes by CBRC (Canadian Board for Respiratory Care). Passing makes you a registered respiratory therapist.
- 4 Register with your provincial regulator** A few weeks
 In Ontario that is the CRTC (College of Respiratory Therapists of Ontario). Most provinces have a college.

Pros and cons

- + Three years to a real intensive care career
- + Union, pension and shift premiums
- + Genuine responsibility. You make airway decisions in emergencies
- Nights, weekends and holidays for most of your career
- You see people die, including children
- Understaffing and burnout are common in intensive care

Optional boosts

Anesthesia assistant. Neonatal and pediatric transport. Cardiovascular perfusion. Sleep lab and pulmonary function testing.

Good to know

A mostly North American job

Respiratory therapy exists as its own profession mainly in Canada and the US. In most other countries, nurses and doctors split the work. A Canadian credential is well respected south of the border.

The pandemic put them on TV

During the 2020 pandemic, respiratory therapists were the people running the ventilators in intensive care. It was the first time most Canadians heard the job title.

Where these numbers come from

Job Bank: Respiratory therapists, wages (updated Nov 2025)

Canadian Society of Respiratory Therapists

Health Professionals Testing Canada, formerly the Canadian Board for Respiratory Care (runs the national exam)

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/respiratory-therapist>



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