

Thoracic Surgeon

The surgeon for the lungs, esophagus and chest wall, mostly cancer. General surgery first, then two or three more years. About 14 years of training.

TYPICAL PAY

\$430,000

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$300k to \$600k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

13 to 16 years

after high school

DEMAND

Good

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Teaching hospitals, cancer centres, operating rooms, thoracic clinics

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. Surgery electives earn the reference letters that decide the match.
- 4 General surgery residency** 5 years
Matched through CaRMS (the residency matching service). Abdomen, breast, trauma, and in-hospital call from year one. Cardiac surgery is the other door into thoracic.
- 5 Thoracic surgery subspecialty** 2 to 3 years
A second match near the end of general surgery. Lung cancer resections, esophagus surgery, keyhole and robotic chest surgery, airway work, chest trauma. Pass the Royal College exam to become FRCSC (Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of Canada), then register with...

Pros and cons

- + One of the highest paid jobs in Canada
- + You cure lung cancer with your hands when it is caught early
- + Academic setting, teaching and research built in
- About 14 years of training, most of it underpaid
- Two matches to win, and the second is tiny
- Jobs exist only at big teaching hospitals

Good to know

Lung cancer kills more Canadians than any other cancer

The Canadian Cancer Society expects about 32,900 new lung cancer cases and 19,300 deaths in Canada in 2026, roughly 22% of all cancer deaths. Surgery is the best chance of cure when it is found early, whi...

The first lung transplant that worked was done in Toronto

In 1983 a team at Toronto General Hospital performed the first lung transplant where the patient lived for years afterward. Canada has been a leader in lung transplant ever since.

Optional boosts

Minimally invasive lung surgery. Esophageal surgery. Lung transplant. Research and trials.

Where these numbers come from

Job Bank: Thoracic surgeon, wages (updated Nov 2025)
Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada
CIHI: A profile of physicians in Canada, 2024 (payments)
CaRMS: the residency match

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/thoracic-surgeon>



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