

Pathologist

The doctor who names the disease. You read tissue and lab results, and other doctors act on what you write.

TYPICAL PAY

\$312,400

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$93k to \$450k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

12 to 14 years

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Hospital laboratories, reference labs, medical examiner offices, un...

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 11 and 12
 Biology, chemistry and physics, with the grades to get into a college where you can hold a high grade point average.
- 2 Bachelor's degree** 4 years
 Any major, as long as you finish the pre-medical science courses and sit the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT).
- 3 Medical school** 4 years
 Two years of classroom science, two years of hospital rotations. You graduate as a Doctor of Medicine (MD) or a Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (DO).
- 4 Pathology residency** 3 to 4 years
 Three years if you train only in anatomic pathology or only in clinical pathology, four years for the combined track most people take.
- 5 Fellowship and boards** 1 to 2 years
 Most pathologists add a subspecialty year, then certify with the American Board of Pathology.

Pros and cons

- + High pay with far better hours than most specialties
- + Intellectually the most detective-like job in medicine
- + Very little of the paperwork that buries clinic doctors
- Twelve years and roughly \$200,000 of debt first
- Almost no patient contact, which some people find hollow
- The pressure is quiet but real: a missed diagnosis is yours

Good to know

Most cancer diagnoses start here

A tumor is not officially cancer until a pathologist looks at the tissue and says so. Oncologists plan treatment from that report, which is why pathologists get called the doctor's doctor.

The board is nearly 90 years old

The American Board of Pathology has been certifying pathologists since 1936, which makes it one of the oldest medical specialty boards in the country.

Optional boosts

Forensic pathology. Hematopathology. Dermatopathology. Molecular genetic pathology.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Physicians, Pathologists (29-1222.00)
 The American Board of Pathology
 Association of American Medical Colleges
 USAJOBS, the federal government's job site

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/pathologist>



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