

Veterinarian

Eight years of school to treat animals who cannot tell you what hurts. Loved by everyone, and heavy on debt.

TYPICAL PAY

\$130,100

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$74k to \$216k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

7 to 9 years

after high school

DEMAND

Very high

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Small animal clinics, emergency hospitals, farms, research labs, zo...

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 11 and 12
Biology, chemistry, physics and math. Start getting hours around animals now: a clinic, a farm, a shelter, a stable.
- 2 Bachelor's degree** 4 years, sometimes 3
Any major, but you must finish the required science courses. Keep a high GPA and build hundreds of hours of animal and veterinary experience, which is what admissions committees actually count.
- 3 Apply through the shared service** Senior year
Most schools take applications through VMCAS (Veterinary Medical College Application Service), run by the American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges.
- 4 Veterinary school** 4 years
Four years for a DVM (Doctor of Veterinary Medicine) degree: science and anatomy first, then clinical rotations through surgery, medicine, farm animals and emergency.
- 5 Licensing** Final year
Pass the NAVLE (North American Veterinary Licensing Examination), then apply to the veterinary board in the state where you want to work.

Pros and cons

- + Six figure pay doing work you believe in
- + Hired anywhere in the country, immediately
- + Huge variety, from surgery to herd health to public health
- Debt of \$150,000 or more against a salary that is good, not spectacular
- Euthanasia and money conversations, over and over
- High rates of burnout and mental health problems in this profession

Optional boosts

Internship then residency. Equine practice. Food animal and dairy. Public health and regulatory work.

Good to know

The licensing exam is shared with Canada

The same examination licenses veterinarians in every state and every Canadian province. It is the only health profession in North America with one exam that crosses the border that completely.

There are fewer vet schools than medical schools

The United States has only about 30 accredited veterinary colleges, against roughly 150 medical schools. That is why getting in is so competitive, and why so many students end up paying out-of-state...

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Veterinarians (29-1131.00)
International Council for Veterinary Assessment: the licensing examination
American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges
Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine: the veterinary degree

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/veterinarian>



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