

# The Medical Technologist and Medical Laboratory Technician

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When it comes to the challenge and rewards of medicine and science, the medical technologist (MT) has the best of both worlds. Medical technologists work in all areas of the clinical laboratory including blood banking, chemistry, hematology, immunology, and microbiology. They perform a full range of laboratory tests – from simple premarital blood tests, to more complex tests to uncover diseases such as HIV/AIDS, diabetes, and cancer. They are also responsible for confirming the accuracy of test results, and reporting laboratory findings to pathologists and other physicians. The information that a medical technologist gives to the doctor influences the medical treatment a patient will receive.

Also known as clinical laboratory scientists (CLS), medical technologists operate complex electronic equipment, computers, and precision instruments costing millions of dollars.

Working under the supervision of a medical technologist, a medical laboratory technician (MLT) performs routine tests in all areas of the clinical laboratory. A medical laboratory technician searches for basic clues to the absence, presence, extent, and causes of diseases. This skilled individual is responsible for performing laboratory tests efficiently and accurately for high-quality patient care.

*"I chose to be a medical technologist because I was interested in the science of the human body. I like my job because every day I know I helped improve somebody's quality of life."*

**Careers**  
in Pathology and Medical Laboratory Science

**Minimum Education Requirement: (MT)**

A baccalaureate degree and completion of an accredited medical technologist program.

**Minimum Education Requirement: (MLT)**

An associate degree and completion of an accredited medical laboratory technician program. If you go on to earn a baccalaureate degree and have the appropriate experience, you can advance to the medical technologist (MT) level.

## Career Preparation

To prepare for a career in medical technology, you should get a solid foundation in high school sciences — biology, chemistry, math and computer science. You'll also need a combination of formal education (baccalaureate degree) plus clinical education in a medical technology or clinical laboratory science program accredited by the National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Sciences (NAACLS). Your education in medical technology will prepare you directly for a job in a variety of laboratory settings. While you're going to school, you can work part time in a laboratory to earn extra money. And you could start working full time the day after you graduate. To become a medical laboratory technician, you will need a combination of formal education plus clinical education in a medical laboratory technician program accredited by NAACLS.

## Scholarships

Through the generous contributions of its members and support from Dade Behring, Inc., the American Society for Clinical Pathology (ASCP) offers scholarships to qualified students enrolled in approved laboratory science educational and training programs. Scholarship selection criteria include academic achievement, leadership abilities and community activities, professional goals, and endorsements from faculty and community leaders.

## Certification

To be sure that laboratory workers are competent and able to perform high quality laboratory tests, the Board of Registry of the American Society for Clinical Pathology (ASCP) gives a national certification exam. Students take this exam after meeting their academic and laboratory education requirements. Those who pass the exam may use the initials MT(ASCP) or MLT(ASCP) after their names to show they are proficient in their field. Certification is valid for three years. To demonstrate competency throughout their careers after their initial certification, laboratory professionals must complete a Certification Maintenance Program every three years.

## Job Opportunities

Medical technologists and medical laboratory technicians have numerous choices of practice settings. Hospitals, independent laboratories, clinics, public health facilities, and industry currently have positions open for qualified medical technologists. Additional opportunities are available for medical technologists in molecular diagnostics, molecular biotechnology companies, in vitro fertilization laboratories, and research laboratories.

## Salaries

According to the ASCP Wage and Vacancy Survey, the average annual salary for medical technologists in the United States ranged from \$45,700 for staff to \$66,500 for managers in 2005. The average annual salary for medical laboratory technicians was \$35,800 for staff and \$41,600 for supervisors.

## Opportunities to Specialize

A medical technologist who gains experience in one of the special areas of the laboratory has the opportunity to gain additional certification or advance to the specialist level. Areas of additional certification and specialization for medical technologists include molecular pathology, microbiology, blood banking, chemistry, hematology, virology, laboratory safety, and the rapidly growing field of immunohistochemistry. In clinical areas, specialists are needed for drug testing and therapeutic drug monitoring. In industry, medical technologists work in product development, marketing, sales, quality assurance, and environmental health. Certification as a medical technologist clearly opens many doors. Motivated medical laboratory technicians with at least two years of wide-ranging laboratory experience go on to earn their bachelor's degree to become qualified to take the certification examination to work as a medical technologist.

## Key Contacts

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**Scholarships:** [www.ascp.org/careerlinks/scholarships/](http://www.ascp.org/careerlinks/scholarships/)  
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The American Society for Clinical Pathology provides excellence in education, certification, and advocacy on behalf of patients, pathologists, and laboratory professionals. Founded in 1922, ASCP is a professional society with 140,000 member pathologists and medical laboratory professionals.