

# Profession Profile: Medical Laboratory Assistant



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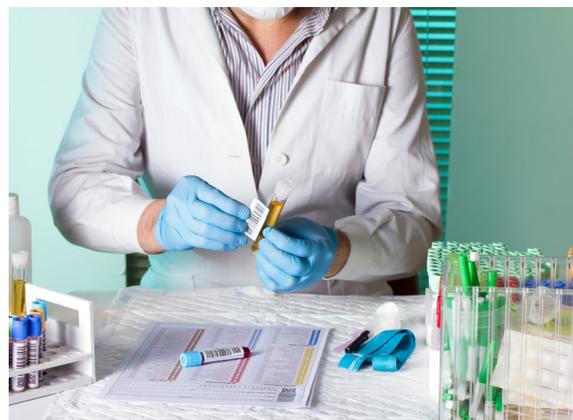
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Medical laboratory assistants work in clinics, hospitals and private labs. Their duties include running lab tests and preparing specimens. It is critical that they are detail-oriented and diligent in handling their workload and processing these tests. The ability to work well in team settings and skills in communication are also crucial to success in this profession.

## Duties

Medical laboratory assistants carry out sampling, testing, measuring, recording and analyzing specimens in cooperation with the rest of the laboratory professional team. The most common tasks include:

- Plate microbiology specimens
- Perform routine and specialized tests
- Prepare and stain slides for analysis
- Perform phlebotomy
- Record testing information
- Clean and restock the lab facility
- Keep inventory and order lab supplies



## Education and Training

Many medical laboratory assistants learn their skills on the job. However, some do go through a formal training program.

**Certification:** Although not required, some employers prefer applicants who are certified by a recognized professional association, such as the American Medical Technologists.

**Advancement:** Medical laboratory assistants can advance and become technicians or technologists through additional education and experience. Technologists may advance to supervisory positions in laboratory work or may become chief technologists or laboratory managers in hospitals. Experienced technologists are also sought by medical and laboratory equipment companies to work in product development, marketing and sales. Professional certification, specialization and/or a graduate degree in medical technology, one of the biological sciences, chemistry, management or education usually speeds advancement.

## Is It Right For You?

Employers seek medical laboratory assistants with good analytical judgment and the ability to work under pressure. Close attention to detail is also essential for laboratory personnel because small differences or changes in test substances or numerical readouts can be crucial to a diagnosis. Manual dexterity and normal color vision are highly desirable, and with the widespread use of automated laboratory equipment, computer skills are important.

## Employment

Medical laboratory assistants work in a variety of settings, including hospitals, independent reference laboratories and in offices of physicians. Rapid job growth and excellent job opportunities for medical laboratory assistants are expected. Most jobs will continue to be in hospitals, but employment will grow faster in other settings.

Employment of laboratory workers is expected to grow 14 percent between 2006 and 2016, faster than average for all occupations. The volume of laboratory tests continues to increase with both population growth and the development of new types of tests. Technological advances will continue to have opposing effects on employment. On the one hand, new, increasingly powerful diagnostic tests will encourage additional testing and spur employment. On the other, research and development efforts targeted at simplifying routine testing procedures may enhance the ability of non-laboratory personnel—physicians and patients in particular—to perform tests now conducted in laboratories. Job opportunities for medical laboratory assistants are expected to be excellent because the number of job openings is expected to continue to exceed the number of job seekers. Although significant, job growth will not be the only source of opportunities. As in most occupations, many additional openings will result from the need to replace workers who transfer to other occupations, retire, or stop working for some other reason.

## Salary

Median annual wage and salary earnings of medical laboratory assistants in 2015 was \$16.45 per hour. There is little difference in wages across laboratory type, hospital size and testing volume.

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