

Pharmacy Technician

Professional Activities

Pharmacy technicians and aides help licensed pharmacists prepare prescription medications, provide customer service, and perform administrative duties within a pharmacy setting. Pharmacy technicians generally are responsible for receiving prescription requests, counting tablets, and labeling bottles, while pharmacy aides perform administrative functions such as answering phones, stocking shelves, and operating cash registers. In organizations that do not have aides, however, pharmacy technicians may be responsible for these clerical duties.

Pharmacy technicians who work in retail or mail-order pharmacies have various responsibilities, depending on State rules and regulations. Technicians receive written prescription requests from patients. They also may receive prescriptions sent electronically from doctors' offices, and in some States they are permitted to process requests by phone. They must verify that the information on the prescription is complete and accurate. To prepare the prescription, technicians retrieve, count, pour, weigh, measure, and sometimes mix the medication. Then they prepare the prescription labels, select the type of container, and affix the prescription and auxiliary labels to the container. Once the prescription is filled, technicians price and file the prescription, which must be checked by a pharmacist before it is given to the patient. Technicians may establish and maintain patient profiles, as well as prepare insurance claim forms. Technicians always refer any questions regarding prescriptions, drug information, or health matters to a pharmacist.

In hospitals, nursing homes, and assisted-living facilities, technicians have added responsibilities, including preparing sterile solutions and delivering medications to nurses or physicians. Technicians may also record the information about the prescribed medication onto the patient's profile.

Pharmacy aides work closely with pharmacy technicians. They primarily perform administrative duties such as answering telephones, stocking shelves, and operating cash registers. They also may prepare insurance forms and maintain patient profiles. Unlike pharmacy technicians, pharmacy aides do not prepare prescriptions or mix medications.

Pharmacy technicians and aides work in clean, organized, well-lighted, and well-ventilated areas. Most of their workday is spent on their feet. They may be required to lift heavy boxes or to use stepladders to retrieve supplies from high shelves. Technicians and aides often have varying schedules that include nights, weekends, and holidays. In facilities that are open 24 hours a day, such as hospital pharmacies, technicians and aides may be required to work nights. Many technicians and aides work part time.

Educational Requirements

There are no standard training requirements for pharmacy technicians, but some States require a high school diploma or its equivalent. Although most pharmacy technicians receive informal on-the-job training, employers favor those who have completed formal training and certification. On-the-job training generally ranges between 3 and 12 months.

Formal technician education programs are available through a variety of organizations, including community colleges, vocational schools, hospitals, and the military. These programs range from 6 months to 2 years and include classroom and laboratory work. They cover a variety of subject areas, such as medical and pharmaceutical terminology, pharmaceutical calculations, pharmacy recordkeeping, pharmaceutical

techniques, and pharmacy law and ethics. Technicians also are required to learn the names, actions, uses, and doses of the medications they work with. Many training programs include internships, in which students gain hands-on experience in actual pharmacies. After completion, students receive a diploma, a certificate, or an associate's degree, depending on the program.

There are no formal education requirements for pharmacy aides, but employers may favor applicants with a high school diploma or its equivalent. Experience operating a cash register, interacting with customers, managing inventory, and using computers may be helpful. Pharmacy aides also receive informal on-the-job training that generally lasts less than 3 months.

In most States, pharmacy technicians must be registered with the State board of pharmacy. Eligibility requirements vary, but in some States applicants must possess a high school diploma or its equivalent and pay an application fee.

Most States do not require technicians to be certified, but voluntary certification is available through several private organizations. The Pharmacy Technician Certification Board (PTCB) and the Institute for the Certification of Pharmacy Technicians (ICPT) administer national certification examinations. Certification through such programs may enhance an applicant's prospects for employment and is required by some States and employers. To be eligible for either exam, candidates must have a high school diploma or its equivalent and no felony convictions. In addition, applicants for the PTCB exam must not have had any drug-related or pharmacy-related convictions, including misdemeanors. Many employers will reimburse the cost of the exams.

Under these programs, technicians must be recertified every 2 years. Recertification requires 20 hours of continuing education within the 2-year certification period. Continuing education hours can be earned from several different sources, including colleges, pharmacy associations, and pharmacy technician training programs. Up to 10 hours of continuing education also can be earned on the job under the direct supervision and instruction of a pharmacist.

Good customer service and communication skills are needed because pharmacy technicians and aides interact with patients, coworkers, and healthcare professionals. Basic mathematics, spelling, and reading skills also are important, as technicians must interpret prescription orders and verify drug doses. Technicians also must be precise: details are sometimes a matter of life and death.

Advancement opportunities generally are limited, but in large pharmacies and health systems pharmacy technicians and aides with significant training or experience can be promoted to supervisory positions. Some may advance into specialty positions such as chemotherapy technician or nuclear pharmacy technician. Others may move into sales. With a substantial amount of formal training, some technicians and aides go on to become pharmacists.

Academic Programs

[Everest College](#)

[Lincoln Trail College](#)

[Malcom X College](#)

[Oakton Community College](#)[Olive-Harvey College](#)

[Rasmussen College](#)

[South Suburban College](#)

[Southeastern Illinois College](#)

Employment/Salary Outlook

The increased number of middle-aged and elderly people—who use more prescription drugs than younger people—will spur demand for pharmacy workers throughout the projection period. In addition, as scientific advances lead to new drugs, and as more people obtain prescription drug coverage, pharmacy workers will be needed in growing numbers.

As cost-conscious insurers begin to use pharmacies as patient-care centers and pharmacists become more involved in patient care, pharmacy technicians will continue to see an expansion of their role in the pharmacy. In addition, they will increasingly adopt some of the administrative duties that were previously performed by pharmacy aides, such as answering phones and stocking shelves.

Job opportunities for pharmacy technicians are expected to be good, especially for those with previous experience, formal training, or certification. Job openings will result from employment growth, as well as the need to replace workers who transfer to other occupations or leave the labor force.

State and National Wages

Location	Pay Period	2021		
		Low	Median	High
United States	Hourly	\$13.82	\$17.66	\$22.88
	Annual	\$28,740	\$36,740	\$47,580
Illinois	Hourly	\$13.96	\$17.61	\$22.50
	Annual	\$29,040	\$36,630	\$46,790

State and National Trends

United States	Employment		Percent Change	Job Openings ¹
	2021	2031		
Pharmacy Technicians	447,300	469,700	5%	43,500
Illinois	Employment		Percent Change	Job Openings ¹
	2020	2030		
Pharmacy Technicians	20,520	22,800	+11%	1,750

¹Job Openings refers to the average annual job openings due to growth and net replacement.

Professional Organizations

Pharmacy Technician Certification Board (ptcb.org)

References

Occupational Outlook Handbook, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (<http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/pharmacy-technicians.htm>)

O*NET OnLine (<http://online.onetcenter.org/link/summary/29-2052.00>)

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