

Respiratory Therapist/Technician

■ Job Description

Respiratory care involves the diagnosis, treatment, management, and preventative care of patients with cardiopulmonary problems. These patients suffer from a variety of acute and chronic conditions that are either life threatening or disabling. Respiratory care personnel assist in the treatment of cardiac and pulmonary ailments such as cardiac failure, asthma, pulmonary edema, cerebral thrombosis, drowning, hemorrhage, and shock.

The respiratory therapist or technician works directly under the guidance of the physician in providing emergency care (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) for patients with sustained cardiorespiratory arrest. The practitioner also shares the responsibility for management of patients on mechanical ventilation. Routine care is equally important. Respiratory practitioners are competent in the use of medical gas, humidification, aerosols, mechanical aids to lung expansion, chest physiotherapy, airway management, pulmonary function, and physiologic monitoring.

■ Job Settings

Hospitals, home care, nursing homes, physicians' offices, and extended care facilities. Four out of five respiratory therapists work in hospitals.

■ Projected Need

Nationally and in Illinois, the number of jobs for respiratory therapists is expected to increase faster than average through the year 2010. Respiratory therapist is one of the 50 fastest growing occupations in the state.

Much of the demand for respiratory therapists will be due to the aging population. Older people suffer most from breathing and lung diseases. As their numbers increase, the need for respiratory therapists will increase. In addition, advances in treatment for different types of patients will also increase the demand for respiratory therapists.

Opportunities are expected to be best for respiratory therapists who have experience working with infants or cardiopulmonary patients. Cardiopulmonary refers to problems that involve both the heart and lungs.

In Illinois, there were about 3,640 respiratory therapists employed in this small occupation in 2000.

■ Salaries

Nationally, the median wage for respiratory therapists is \$18.93 per hour. Half of all respiratory therapists earn between \$16.17 and \$21.68 per hour.

Median wage for respiratory therapists working in Illinois is \$18.36 per hour. Respiratory therapy technicians earn a median wage of \$14.48 per hour. Wages range from \$10.22 per hour for entry-level technicians to \$18.91 per hour for those with experience.

■ Related Careers

Nurse, emergency medical technician, occupational therapist, physical therapist, physician assistant, and radiation technologist

■ Differences in Training

Formal training programs vary in length and in the credential or degree awarded. Some programs award associate's or bachelor's degrees and prepare graduates for jobs as registered respiratory therapists (RRTs). Certificate programs generally take one year to complete and lead to jobs as entry-level certified respiratory therapists (CRTs). Areas of study for respiratory therapy programs include human anatomy and physiology, chemistry, physics, microbiology, and mathematics. Technical courses deal with procedures, equipment, and clinical tests.

The following community colleges in Illinois offer respiratory therapy certificate programs:

College of DuPage - Glen Ellyn
Illinois Central College - Peoria
Kankakee Community College - Kankakee
Kaskaskia College - Centralia
Southwestern Illinois College - Belleville

Associate degree programs are offered at the following Illinois community colleges:

Black Hawk College - Moline
Carl Sandburg College - Galesburg
College of DuPage - Glen Ellyn
Illinois Central College - East Peoria

Kankakee Community College - Kankakee
Kaskaskia College - Centralia
Malcolm X College - Chicago
Moraine Valley Community College - Palos Hills
Olive-Harvey College - Chicago
Parkland College - Champaign
Rock Valley College - Rockford
Southwestern Illinois College - Belleville
Triton College - River Grove
Waubensee Community College - Sugar Grove

The American Respiratory Care Foundation offers undergraduate and postgraduate education awards of \$1,000 and \$2,500 each. Also, one \$1,000 scholarship is available to minority students already enrolled in a respiratory care training program.

National Board for Respiratory Care
8310 Nieman Road
Lenexa, KS 66214
Phone: 913.599.4200
<http://www.nbrc.org>

■ **Related Educational Programs**

The programs of study listed below are the recommended areas of study to pursue for this occupation. Clicking on these will lead to files that show in-state and national schools that offer these programs.

The following link(s) will take you to CIS for more information. CIS requires an ID and password that can be obtained at <http://cis.ilworkinfo.com/loginhelp/> You must log into CIS prior to clicking on the links below.

[Respiratory Therapy](#)

■ **Credentials**

The National Board for Respiratory Care (NBRC) offers registration and certification to graduates of CoARC-accredited programs. Two credentials are awarded: Registered Respiratory Therapist (RRT) and Certified Respiratory Therapist (CRT). Anyone desiring certification must take the CRT exam first. After successfully completing this exam, those who are eligible can take the RRT exam. In Illinois, respiratory therapists must be licensed by the Illinois Department of Professional Regulation.

■ **Advanced Training**

There are programs offering a baccalaureate degree in respiratory care, which leads to supervisory and teaching positions.

■ **Resources**

American Association for Respiratory Care
9425 N. MacArthur Blvd., Suite 100
Irving, TX 75063-4706
Phone: 972.243.2272
E-mail: info@aacrc.org
<http://www.aarc.org>
Click on "Career" then on "Be an RT."