

MEDICAL LABORATORY TECHNICIAN



get on the diagnostic services path

Is this the job for me?

Take this quick quiz to find out if medical lab technician is a good direction for you:

- 1 Do you like to solve mysteries and put puzzles together?
 YES NO
- 2 Do you like to work on a team?
 YES NO
- 3 Are you very careful and exact in your work?
 YES NO
- 4 Do you enjoy hands-on science experiments and working with data?
 YES NO
- 5 Can you add, subtract, multiply and divide quickly and correctly?
 YES NO
- 6 Are you good at handling very small objects or small amounts of material?
 YES NO
- 7 Do you want to get into a career in about two years?
 YES NO

If you answered yes to several of these questions, you may be on the right track!

What's it all about?

Did you know more than 70 percent of physicians' medical decisions are based on laboratory test findings? And many times, it's a medical laboratory technician (MLT) who runs the tests doctors use to detect, diagnose and treat diseases.

Working under the supervision of a medical technologist, a MLT uses sophisticated instruments to analyze samples of body fluids, cells or tissues. MLTs usually work in hospital labs, clinics and doctors' offices.

What do MLTs do?

In a typical day, a MLT may:

- Run tests using samples of body fluids, cells or tissues.
- Look for abnormalities or disease organisms.
- Evaluate test results.
- Keep accurate records of medical tests.
- Communicate with physicians, medical researchers and pathologists about test results.
- Select and prepare specimens and media for cell culture.
- Grow cell cultures using appropriate media and environmental conditions.
- Prepare slides for examination.

- Perform tests to determine blood type for blood transfusions or for blood counts.
- Prepare specimens and use machines that automatically analyze samples.
- Follow detailed instructions to do tests by hand.
- Set up, adjust, clean and maintain lab equipment.
- May supervise other technicians and laboratory assistants.
- May conduct research under the supervision of medical researchers.

How much money can I make?

In Alaska, MLTs earn an average hourly wage of \$20.67, and have an average annual salary of \$42,990.

How do I become a MLT? How long does it take?

To become a MLT, you must:

- Have a high school diploma or GED, preferably with a background in science and math.
- Complete a MLT program.

Most MLT programs offer an associate's degree, which usually takes two years to earn. Some MLTs go on to complete more advanced medical programs to become medical technologists or physician assistants.

Learn more about MLT programs in Alaska by reviewing the “training providers” section later in this publication.

Attention high school students!

Think you want to become a MLT? Well, the time to start planning is now. In general, you should take four years of English, three years of math, three years of social studies, two years of science and possibly two years of a second language. You should also consider taking college preparatory or advanced placement (AP) courses. Other recommended classes and electives include:

- Anatomy and physiology
- Physical science
- Biology
- Chemistry
- Physics
- Pre-algebra, algebra and advanced algebra
- Medical lab technology
- Community health
- Safety and first aid
- Health care occupations
- Computer fundamentals
- Keyboarding
- Basic computer
- Computer technology

You should also discuss your plans with a teacher, counselor or parent, and check to see what work-based learning opportunities, such as field trips, job shadowing and internships, are available in your community.

Are there jobs available?

There are currently about eight job openings a year for MLTs in Alaska, and this occupation is expected to continue to grow quickly (21.3 percent growth compared to 14.8 percent for all occupations).

Where are the jobs?

About one-third of MLTs work in hospitals. They also work in doctors’ offices and clinics. In rural Alaska, MLTs often work in regional hospitals.

What else is on this pathway?

Want to learn about other possible opportunities in the diagnostic services career pathway? Be sure to read about radiographic technologist – another diagnostic services “hot job” in Alaska!

