



get on the clinical services path

Is this the job for me?

Take this quick quiz to find out if pharmacist is a good direction for you:

- 1 Do you want an in-depth understanding of what medications are and how they affect the body?
 YES NO
- 2 Are you very exact and detailed?
 YES NO
- 3 Do you enjoy talking and explaining things to people?
 YES NO
- 4 Are you strong in math and science?
 YES NO
- 5 Do you like practical, hands-on work?
 YES NO
- 6 Do you want a job where you train and supervise others?
 YES NO
- 7 Are you willing to invest six or more years in your education?
 YES NO

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

What's it all about?

Pharmacists are specialists in the science and use of medications. They have the very important job of preparing and dispensing medications that are prescribed by doctors and other health care workers. In addition to dispensing drugs, pharmacists also make sure prescribed medications will not interact with other drugs the patient may be taking, and ensures that the medication and dosage are appropriate. Pharmacists also educate patients about the medication they are taking.

Pharmacists work in hospitals, nursing homes and retail drug stores. Some pharmacists specialize in areas such as community health, home health, hospital medicine, nuclear pharmacy, quality control or research.

What do pharmacists do?

Common responsibilities of a pharmacist include:

- Dispense drugs prescribed by doctors and health care workers.
- Review prescriptions for accuracy before dispensing.
- Ask patients about symptoms and current medicines they are taking.
- Instruct patients on how to store and use various medicines.
- Provide information to patients about dosage, side effects and drug interactions.
- Analyze patient records to prevent overuse or interactions.
- Determine the strength, type and purity of medications.

- Prepare sterile equipment for use by doctors and patients.
- Order drugs and other medical supplies.
- Monitor the security of controlled substances and the disposal of hazardous waste.
- Maintain records, such as pharmacy inventory and patient profiles.
- Hire, train and supervise employees and interns.
- Review, monitor and evaluate drug therapies for patients.
- Provide services to help patients manage special health conditions.
- Answer questions and make recommendations to customers about over-the-counter drugs and medical supplies.
- Advise health care providers on selection and effects of drugs.
- Provide information and activities that promote health.
- Refer patients to other health care resources or providers.
- May compound (mix) medications using standard formulas and processes.

How much money can I make?

In Alaska, pharmacists earn an average hourly wage of \$50.77, and have an average annual salary of \$105,610.

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

To become a pharmacist, you must:

- Have a high school diploma or GED.
- Be fluent in reading, writing and speaking English.
- Complete at least two years of accredited college work prior to entering pharmacy school.
- Graduate from a four-year pharmacy school with a doctor of pharmacy (PharmD) degree.
- May need to complete a residency after graduation.
- Complete a 1,500-hour internship under the direct supervision of a licensed pharmacist.
- Pass the North American Pharmacist Licensure Exam (NAPLEX) and Multistate Pharmacy Jurisprudence Exam (MPJE).
- Obtain an Alaska pharmacist license.
- Complete 30 hours of continuing education every two years.

After high school, it takes approximately six years of education to become a pharmacist, including two years of college-level, pre-pharmacy courses and four years of pharmacy school. Some pharmacists choose to pursue advanced degrees, such as master's degrees or doctorates.

While there are currently no pharmacy programs in Alaska, planning has begun to bring and host programs in the state. A pre-pharmacy program is also under development. Learn more by reviewing the "training providers" section later in this publication.

Attention high school students!

Think you want to become a pharmacist? 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 and advanced placement (AP) classes. Other recommended classes and electives include:

- Anatomy and physiology
- Health education
- Introduction to health care
- Health care occupations
- Trigonometry
- Physics
- Biology
- Chemistry
- Computer applications
- Keyboarding

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 16 job openings a year for pharmacists in Alaska, and this occupation is expected to continue to grow quickly (25.9 percent growth compared to 14.8 percent for all occupations).

Where are the jobs?

In Alaska, pharmacists work in hospitals, nursing homes, retail drug stores, and with the Indian Health Service.

What else is on this pathway?

Want to learn about other possible opportunities in the clinical services career pathway? Be sure to read about medical assistants and pharmacy technicians – other clinical services "hot jobs" in Alaska!

