

Quick Guides to the Health Professions

Respiratory Therapists

What is a respiratory therapist?

A respiratory therapist (RT) is a healthcare professional whose role is to provide diagnostic and therapeutic procedures to individuals that require cardiopulmonary services. They participate in the education of patients, families, students, and other health care professionals of cardiopulmonary disease treatment and management.

What do respiratory therapists do?

RTs are life-supporting healthcare professionals dedicated to the assessment, diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation, and education of patients with cardiopulmonary disorders. They treat patients across a broad age range spectrum, from infants to geriatric patients. Precision must be exercised while working with equipment to administer medical gases and medicated aerosol therapy to manage and control breathing-related abnormalities. They assess, monitor, and stabilize patients' cardio-respiratory systems and may perform services such as airway maintenance, ventilator management, pulmonary function testing, blood analysis, line insertions, inductions, and intubations.

Where do respiratory therapists work?

RTs work in a variety of settings including hospitals, extended and assisted living care facilities, community-based care, homecare, research facilities, and diagnostic laboratories for heart, lung, and sleep disorders.

Education and preparation

RTs must complete a comprehensive three-year diploma in respiratory therapy. The program includes classroom-based learning, lab study, and clinical placements. Students are expected to complete competency-based objectives and are evaluated on their performance in clinical rotations and in exams.

Licensure

In Alberta, respiratory therapists must be certified by the College and Association of Respiratory Therapists of Alberta (CARTA). This certification includes an examination, which is administered by the Canadian Board for Respiratory Care (CBRC).

Professional organizations

College and Association of Respiratory Therapists of Alberta (CARTA)
<https://www.carta.ca/>

Canadian Board for Respiratory Care (CBRC)
<https://cbrc.ca/>

Contributors to this guide

Office of Interprofessional Education and Practice, Western University Canada
<https://www.uwo.ca/fhs/education/ipe/index.html>

College and Association of Respiratory Therapists of Alberta (CARTA)
<https://www.carta.ca/>



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