

## CAREERS

# Animal Health Technologist

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CAREER INFORMATION

By Dick Davis

• Just as people sometimes become ill or injured and need medical attention, our Fido or Fifi may sometimes require professional care. Enter the animal health technologist, who assists veterinarians in trying to cure pets and animals.

• Animal health technologists obtain and record information about cases, prepare patients, instruments and equipment for surgery; collect specimens and perform laboratory procedures, dress wounds; assist in diagnostic, medical and surgical procedures; expose and develop X-rays and communicating with animal owners.

• Entry requirements include sciences like biology and chemistry along with algebra and physics. As with other professions, volunteering in related disciplines helps you to be accepted to the college of your choice.

• Both the U.S. and Canada are a little fuzzy on their definition of an animal health technologist. Depending on the state, they can be called animal technicians, veterinary assistants, veterinary technologists or veterinary technicians.

The basic differences are that an assistant is a lay person who performs entry-level tasks, while a technician has received a diploma from a two- to four-year program accredited by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA). Meanwhile, the typical technologist has a bachelor's degree in veterinary technology from an AVMA accredited program.

Marie Clark, a certified vet technologist in Arkansas, agrees that there should be a clearer distinction among the terms. Please check with your local or state veterinary associations for more information.

## Stats

**Salary** \$14,500

**Education** certificate -  
bachelor's

**Workforce** 53,000



- Prospective technologists should: be in good physical condition; remain calm under pressure; possess excellent interpersonal skills; possess excellent oral and written communication skills; and have sound decision making skills.

"Since veterinary technology programs are science oriented, high school students can best prepare academically by taking math and science courses and a general college preparatory curriculum," says Thomas Colville, a veterinarian and professor at North Dakota State University.

Colville notes that this isn't the field for everyone. "I also highly recommend that students interested in this field volunteer at a veterinary clinic to see what goes on 'behind the scenes.' This often allows students to make more informed career decisions."

Colorado veterinary technician Lauren Kaufman agrees. "There's really a lot of clean up," says Kaufman. "People bring animals in sometimes to be euthanized. I think it's important to volunteer and get that experience to see what you really want to do."

The work experience has other benefits - on the job training for example. "You also should learn how to hold animals," suggests Christina Pander, a veterinary assistant in Pennsylvania. "You hold each one differently. Cats are different from dogs. You definitely wouldn't hold a cat the same."

- Veterinary technicians are employed in other facilities like veterinary hospitals, biological research labs, drug or feed manufacturing companies, animal production facilities, zoos and meat packing companies, reports the AVMA. Here responsibilities include record keeping, animal care and feeding, equipment and product maintenance and carcass inspection. Their work is supervised by a scientist or a senior technologist.

The veterinary technician's oath is: "I solemnly dedicate myself to aiding animals and society by providing excellent care and service for animals, by alleviating animal suffering and by promoting public health. I accept my obligations to practice my profession conscientiously and with sensitivity, adhering to the profession's code of ethics, and furthering my knowledge and competence through a commitment to lifelong learning."

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- According to the AVMA, there are 72 accredited schools in the U.S.



offering veterinary technology - although five of the schools' full accreditation is pending.

- According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics there are about 22,000 veterinary technicians or veterinary technologists in and about 31,000 vet assistants. There are about 7,500 animal health technologists in Canada, according to the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association. About 400 new vet assistants graduate from Canadian colleges to join the workforce each year.
- Career prospects look bright due to the significant increase in the number of dogs and cats over the past 10 years. The outlook for this field is expected to continue growing in the future, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Rising incomes and movement of baby boomers into the 34 to 59 age group, the age range with the highest pet ownership, are also good signs for this profession.
- In the U.S. starting salaries range from \$14,376 to \$20,922 and average salaries for experienced graduates of accredited programs go from \$15,618 to \$26,024, according to the AVMA.

### **Education**

#### **Mount Ida College**

<http://www.mountida.edu/p2-vt.html>

#### **Portland Community College**

P.O. Box 19000

Portland, Ore. 97280-0990

Internet: <http://www.pcc.edu/academ/vettech/>

### **Associations**

#### **Student Veterinary Emergency and Critical Care Society**

8015 Broadway-Suite 216

San Antonio, Tex. 78209

Phone: 210-826-1488

#### **American Veterinary Medical Association**

100-1931 Meacham Road

Schaumburg, Ill. 61173

Phone: 800-248-2862

#### **North American Veterinary Technologists Association**

P.O. Box 224

Battle Ground, Ind. 47920  
317-742-2216

**Publications**

Veterinary Emergency and Critical Care, by Robert Murtaugh and Paul Kaplan, published by Mosley

**Veterinary Product News**

P.O. Box 6050  
Mission Viejo, Calif. 92690  
Phone: 800-426-2516

**Canadian Veterinary Medical Journal**

CVMA  
339 Booth St.,  
Ottawa, Ont.  
K1R 7K1  
Phone: 613-236-1162



**Net Sites**

**Occupational Outlook Handbook**

For more information related to this field, see Agricultural Scientists in the OOH

<http://stats.bls.gov/oco/ocos046.htm>

**Veterinary Technician As A Career**

A good overview of the career, plus tips

<http://www.avma.org/care4pets/caretech.htm>

**American Veterinary Medical Association**

<http://www.avma.org/care4pets/default.htm>