



# Respiratory Therapists

## **Definition**

Respiratory therapists are health care professionals who assist physicians with the diagnosis and treatment of lung disorders.

## **Responsibilities/Activities**

The duties of a respiratory therapist include: maintaining an open airway for trauma, intensive-care and surgery patients; assisting in cardiopulmonary resuscitation and support; providing life support for patients who cannot breathe on their own; assisting in high-risk births; stabilizing high-risk patients being moved by air or ground ambulance; assisting anesthesiologists in the operating room; administering inhaled drugs and medical gases such as asthma medication and oxygen; conducting tests to measure lung function; teaching people to manage their asthma or to quit smoking; and providing in-home respiratory care to adults and children with chronic lung disease.

## **Practice Setting**

Most respiratory therapists work in hospitals. They may be found in neonatal nurseries, operating rooms, intensive-care units, general wards and emergency departments. Respiratory therapists also work in the community, bringing their expertise to the following areas: home care; asthma, emphysema, cystic fibrosis and other clinics; teaching; research; rehabilitation; diagnostic clinics and sleep-disorder laboratories; hyper-baric oxygen treatment; and medical equipment sales and services.

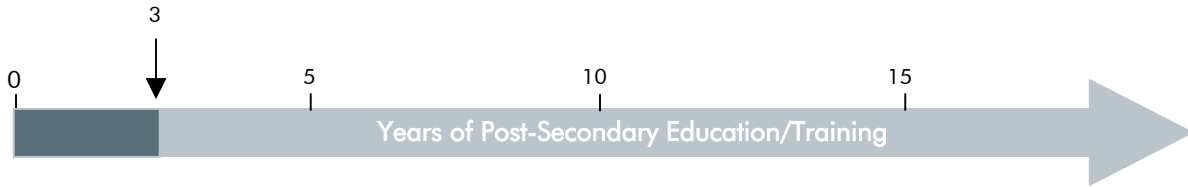
**Note:** Readers are cautioned to carefully review the Methodological Notes section of this publication as well as all notes accompanying the figures and tables.

# Entering the Profession

## Education and/or Training

The figure and table below outline the education and/or training requirements necessary to enter practice as a respiratory therapist in Canada.

- A total of three years of post-secondary education is required.



Typical Length of Program	Province of Education	Education and/or Training
3	All provinces except Prince Edward Island and Saskatchewan	Diploma in respiratory therapy (RT).

## Changes to Education and/or Training Requirements \*\*

- There is no anticipated change to education and/or training requirements within the next five years.
- Some universities provide the option to receive a bachelor of health sciences (BHS) in conjunction with an RT diploma.

## Possible Areas of Certified Specialization \*\*

- Respiratory therapists specialize in the areas of asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) education and undergo recognized certification processes. Most other specialties are based on institutional-specific training and certification processes for various clinical services such as neonatal, high-risk transport, intubation, arterial-line insertion and tracheotomy tube changes.

## Exam Requirements \*\*

- In order to practise as a respiratory therapist in Canada, graduates may be required pass a certification exam. Most provinces that do use a certification exam use the one produced by the Canadian Board for Respiratory Care, available from [www.cbrc.ca](http://www.cbrc.ca).

For further details on exam requirements for the four regulated provinces (Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba and Alberta), please consult the respective provincial regulatory body. Outside of these provinces, please contact the Canadian Society of Respiratory Therapists for more information.

\*\* Please note that the information in this section is adapted from a survey completed in 2005 by the staff at the Canadian Society of Respiratory Therapists (see Appendix C for the survey tool).

# Workforce

**Primary Data Source:** The primary sources of respiratory therapist data for the Health Personnel Database (HPDB) at the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) are regulatory/licensing authorities (in which membership is a condition of practice) and professional associations (in which membership is voluntary).

## Regulatory Environment

The table below indicates the first year in which it became mandatory for respiratory therapists to register with a provincial/territorial regulatory authority as a condition of practice.

- Registration with a provincial licensing authority is a mandatory condition of practice for respiratory therapists in four provinces: Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba and Alberta.

	N.L.	P.E.I.	N.S.	N.B.	Que.	Ont.	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	B.C.	Y.T.	N.W.T.	Nun.
First Year of Regulation	NR	NR	NR	NR	1985	1991	1981	NR	1988	NR	..	..	..

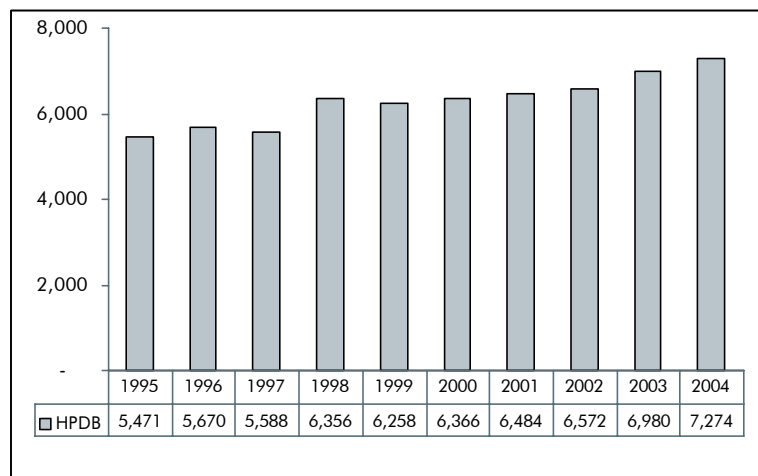
.. Information not available.

NR = Not regulated as of 2004.

## Supply Trends

- Please view the data with some caution. Only four provinces are regulated (mandatory registration is required in order to practise). This may influence the data in that the number of respiratory therapists may be undercounted, as there is no mandatory requirement to register (outside of the four regulated provinces).
- As shown in Figure RT-1, the number of registered respiratory therapists grew at an average rate of 3.3% per year from 1995 to 2004. This represents a 32.9% increase in the number of respiratory therapists over this 10-year period (an increase of 1803 respiratory therapists).
- The distribution of registered respiratory therapists by province from 1995 to 2004 is outlined in Table RT-1. The table indicates that in 2004, 40.2% of all respiratory therapists in Canada were registered in Quebec.

**Figure RT-1. Number of Respiratory Therapists in Canada, 1995 to 2004**



Source: HPDB/CIHI.

**Table RT-1. Number of Registered Respiratory Therapists\* by Province/Territory, Canada, 1995 to 2004**

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
N.L. <sup>†</sup>	63	71	65	78	50	60	70	64	67 <sup>8</sup>	68 <sup>8</sup>
P.E.I. <sup>†</sup>	6	11	14	17	14	13	14 <sup>1</sup>	14 <sup>1</sup>	14 <sup>1</sup>	14 <sup>1</sup>
N.S. <sup>†</sup>	166	172	186	223	176	179	152 <sup>1</sup>	154 <sup>1</sup>	150 <sup>9</sup>	184
N.B. <sup>†</sup>	159	169	170	193	177	192	213	168	167 <sup>7</sup>	220 <sup>7</sup>
Que. <sup>2</sup>	2,338	2,354	2,221 <sup>†,1</sup>	2,457	2,534	2,602	2,651	2,651	2,807	2,925
Ont. <sup>3</sup>	1,572	1,628	1,658	1,727	1,812	1,816	1,846	1,923	2,083	2,198
Man. <sup>4</sup>	183	186	195	189	200	201	197	200	233	234
Sask. <sup>†</sup>	92	94	94	116	95	93	98 <sup>1</sup>	99 <sup>1</sup>	97 <sup>10</sup>	103
Alta. <sup>5</sup>	620	681	680	812	812	832	867	895	870	922
B.C. <sup>†</sup>	271	303	304	540	384	374	373	401	488	402 <sup>6</sup>
Y.T. & N.W.T. <sup>†</sup>	1	1	1	4	4	4	3 <sup>1</sup>	3 <sup>1</sup>	4	4 <sup>1</sup>
Nun.	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Canada <sup>†</sup>	<b>5,471</b>	<b>5,670</b>	<b>5,588</b>	<b>6,356</b>	<b>6,258</b>	<b>6,366</b>	<b>6,484</b>	<b>6,572</b>	<b>6,980</b>	<b>7,274</b>

Source: HPDB/CIHI.

**Notes**

\* This data table includes regulated membership data (registration with the data provider is a condition of practice) and voluntary membership data (registration with the data provider is not a condition of practice); data in this table are useful for some purposes but should be used within the limitations noted (see Methodological Notes as well as notes accompanying data tables).

† Indicates the presence of voluntary membership data or estimated data (all estimated data are accompanied by superscript notes identifying the source of the estimate; that is, CIHI or data provider). See additional notes below.

As of 2004, respiratory therapists are regulated in four provinces: Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba and Alberta.

.. Information not available

1. CIHI estimate.

2. Non-practising respiratory therapists are not included in the figures for Quebec. Data are provided by the Ordre professionnel des inhalothérapeutes du Québec. Data as of March of the following year, except for 2003, when data are as of May 5, 2004.

3. Ontario data for the years 1995 to 2004 are provided by the College of Respiratory Therapists of Ontario; 2003 data as of February 29, 2004; 2004 data as of February 28, 2005.

4. Manitoba data are provided by the Manitoba Association of Registered Respiratory Therapists and only include active registered respiratory therapists; 2003 data as of April 29, 2004.

5. Alberta data for the years 1998 to 2004 are provided by the College and Association of Respiratory Therapists of Alberta.

6. According to the British Columbia Society of Respiratory Therapists, it is estimated that there are 715 respiratory therapists in British Columbia; however, only 402 were actually registered with the British Columbia Society of Respiratory Therapists. Membership is not required to practise in British Columbia.

7. New Brunswick: 2003 data as of April 30, 2004; 2004 data as of December 15, 2004.

8. Newfoundland and Labrador: 2003 data as of November 2, 2003; 2004 data as of November 9, 2004.

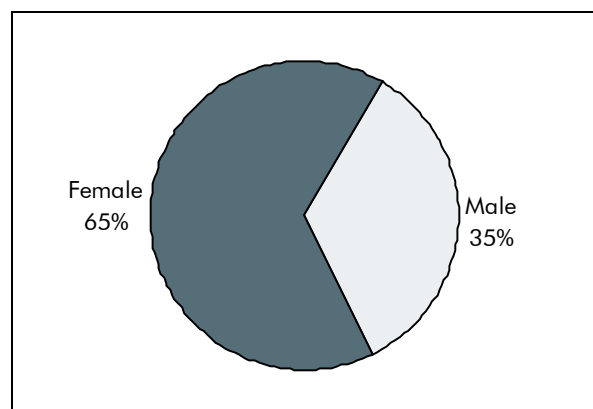
9. Nova Scotia: 2003 data as of January 15, 2004.

10. Saskatchewan: 2003 data as of March 31, 2004.

**What Else Do We Know?**

- The percentage of women in the respiratory therapy profession was 65% in 2001 (Source: Census Data, Statistics Canada). Please note that this data includes information for both respiratory therapists and clinical perfusionists.
- The average age of respiratory therapists in Canada is 37 years. Female respiratory therapists tend to be slightly younger on average than their males colleagues (35 and 39 years, respectively) (Source: 2001 Census Data, Statistics Canada). For more details on average age and gender refer to Appendix F.

**Figure RT-2. Respiratory Therapists by Gender, Canada, 2001**



Source: Census, Statistics Canada.



# What's Happening?

Listed below are references to key research documents relating to respiratory therapists that are recommended\*\* reading for health human resource planners.

## Research Reports

1. "The Coming RT Shortage." Sobel, Litwin, Seville and Homuth, *Canadian Journal of Respiratory Therapy*, Winter 2000, available from [www.csrt.com](http://www.csrt.com)

List of research reports was updated in November 2005.

## Research in Progress

- There is no information to report at this time.

**Note:** Reports and research identified are products of independent individuals and/or organizations. Their opinions and/or views, as well as content, do not necessarily reflect those of CIHI. They are put here for the user's interest and for reference only. Authors retain all copyright privileges. Information provided is not comprehensive.

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\*\* Please note that the information in this section is adapted from a survey completed in 2005 by the staff at the Canadian Society of Respiratory Therapists (see Appendix C for the survey tool).

# Endnotes

## Sources

- Figure RT-1. Calculated from data in Table RT-1.
- Figure RT-2. Calculated using Census Data, Statistics Canada, 2001.
- Table RT-1. 1995 to 1997: Canadian Society of Respiratory Therapists, Manitoba Association of Registered Respiratory Therapists Inc., College of Respiratory Therapists of Ontario, New Brunswick Association of Respiratory Therapists Inc. and Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Respiratory Therapists.
- 1998 to 2000: Canadian Society of Respiratory Therapists, Ordre professionnel des inhalothérapeutes du Québec, Manitoba Association of Registered Respiratory Therapists Inc., College and Association of Respiratory Therapists of Alberta, College of Respiratory Therapists of Ontario, New Brunswick Association of Respiratory Therapists Inc. and Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Respiratory Therapists.
- 2001 to 2004: Ordre professionnel des inhalothérapeutes du Québec, Manitoba Association of Registered Respiratory Therapists Inc., British Columbia Society of Respiratory Therapists, College and Association of Respiratory Therapists of Alberta, College of Respiratory Therapists of Ontario, New Brunswick Association of Respiratory Therapists Inc., Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Respiratory Therapists, Saskatchewan Association of Respiratory Therapists (2003–2004) and Respiratory Therapists Society of Nova Scotia (2003–2004).