

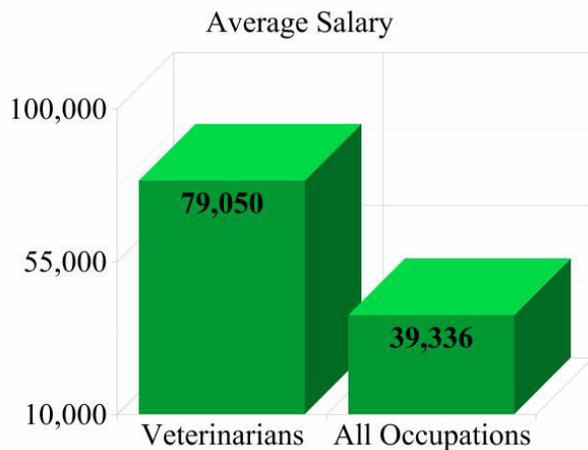
Veterinarians

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WHAT THEY DO

Veterinarians diagnose and treat diseases and dysfunctions of animals. Specifically, they care for the health of pets, livestock, and animals in zoos, racetracks, and laboratories. Some veterinarians use their skills to protect humans against diseases carried by animals and conduct clinical research on human and animal health problems. Others work in basic research, broadening our knowledge of animals and medical science, and in applied research, developing new ways to use knowledge.

Most veterinarians diagnose animal health problems, vaccinate against diseases, medicate animals suffering from infections or illnesses, treat and dress wounds, set fractures, perform surgery, and advise owners about animal feeding, behavior, and breeding.



According to the American Medical Veterinary Association, 77 percent of veterinarians who work in private medical practices treat pets. These practitioners usually care for dogs and cats but also treat birds, reptiles, rabbits, ferrets, and other animals that can be kept as pets. About 16 percent of veterinarians work in private mixed and food animal practices, where they see pigs, goats, cattle, sheep, and some wild animals in addition to farm animals. A small proportion of private-practice veterinarians, about 6 percent, work exclusively with horses.

Veterinarians who work with food animals or horses usually drive to farms or ranches to provide veterinary services for herds or individual animals. These veterinarians test for and vaccinate against diseases and consult with farm or ranch owners and managers regarding animal production, feeding, and housing issues. They also treat and dress wounds, set fractures, and perform surgery, including cesarean sections on birthing animals. Other veterinarians care for zoo, aquarium, or laboratory animals. Veterinarians of all types euthanize animals when necessary.

Soldering commonly is used to make electrical and electronic circuit boards, such as computer chips. Soldering workers tend to work with small pieces that must be precisely positioned. Brazing often is used to connect copper plumbing pipes and thinner metals that the higher temperatures of welding would warp. Brazing also can be used to apply coatings to parts to reduce wear and protect against corrosion.

EDUCATION REQUIRED

Prospective veterinarians must graduate with a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (D.V.M. or V.M.D.) degree from a 4-year program at an accredited college of veterinary medicine. There are 28 colleges in 26 States that meet accreditation standards set by the Council on Education of the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA).

The prerequisites for admission to veterinary programs vary. Many programs do not require a bachelor's degree for entrance, but all require a significant number of credit hours—ranging from 45 to 90 semester hours—at the undergraduate level. However, most of the students admitted have completed an undergraduate program and earned a bachelor's degree. Applicants without a degree face a difficult task in gaining admittance.

Preveterinary courses should emphasize the sciences. Veterinary medical colleges typically require applicants to have taken classes in organic and inorganic chemistry, physics, biochemistry, general biology, animal biology, animal nutrition, genetics, vertebrate embryology, cellular biology, microbiology, zoology, and systemic physiology.

Some programs require calculus; some require only statistics, college algebra and trigonometry, or pre-calculus. Most veterinary medical colleges also require some courses in English or literature, other humanities, and the social sciences. Increasingly, courses in general business management and career development have become a standard part of the curriculum to teach new graduates how to effectively run a practice.

In addition to satisfying preveterinary course requirements, applicants must submit test scores from the Graduate Record Examination (GRE), the Veterinary College Admission Test (VCAT), or the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT), depending on the preference of the college to which they are applying. Currently, 22 schools require the GRE, 4 require the VCAT, and 2 accept the MCAT.

New graduates with a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree may begin to practice veterinary medicine once they receive their license, but many new graduates choose to enter a 1-year internship. Interns receive a small salary but often find that their internship experience leads to better paying opportunities later, relative to those of other veterinarians. Veterinarians who then seek board certification also must complete a 3-year to 4-year residency program that provides intensive training in one of the 39 AVMA-recognized veterinary specialties.

Veterinarians - Continued

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OTHER USEFUL SKILLS

When deciding whom to admit, some veterinary medical colleges place heavy consideration on candidates' veterinary and animal experience. Formal experience, such as work with veterinarians or scientists in clinics, agribusiness, research, or some area of health science, is particularly advantageous. Less formal experience, such as working with animals on a farm, or at a stable or animal shelter, also can be helpful. Students must demonstrate ambition and an eagerness to work with animals.

Prospective veterinarians should love animals and have the ability to get along with their owners, especially pet owners, who usually have strong bonds with their pets. They need good manual dexterity. Veterinarians who intend to go into private practice should possess excellent communication and business skills, because they will need to successfully manage their practice and employees and promote, market, and sell their services.

HOW TO ADVANCE

Most veterinarians begin as employees in established group practices. Despite the substantial financial investment in equipment, office space, and staff, many veterinarians with experience eventually set up their own practice or purchase an established one. Newly trained veterinarians can become U.S. Government meat and poultry inspectors, disease-control workers, animal welfare and safety workers, epidemiologists, research assistants, or commissioned officers in the U.S. Public Health Service or various branches of the U.S. Armed Forces. A State license may be required.

WORK ENVIRONMENT

Veterinarians in private or clinical practice often work long hours in a noisy indoor environment. Sometimes they have to deal with emotional or demanding pet owners.

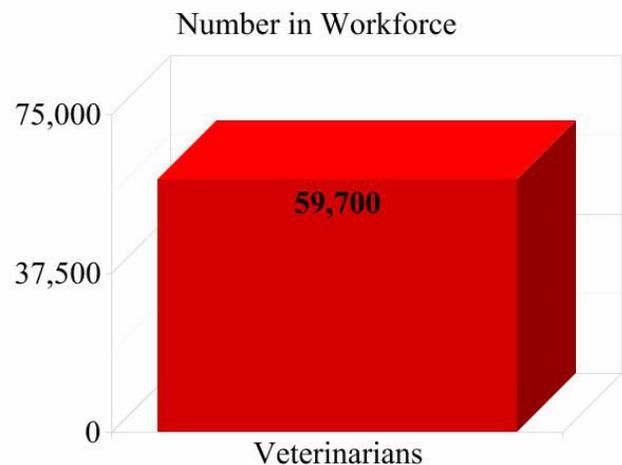
Veterinarians who work with food animals or horses spend time driving between their offices and farms or ranches. They work outdoors in all kinds of weather and may have to treat animals or perform surgery, often under unsanitary conditions. Veterinarians working in nonclinical areas, such as public health and research, work in clean, well-lit offices or laboratories and have working conditions similar to those of other professionals who work in these environments. Veterinarians in nonclinical areas spend much of their time dealing with people rather than animals.

Veterinarians often work long hours. Those in group practices may take turns being on call for evening, night, or weekend work; solo practitioners may work extended hours (including weekend hours), responding to emergencies or squeezing in unexpected appointments.

JOB GROWTH

Employment of veterinarians is expected to increase 33 percent over the 2008–18 decade, much faster than the average for all occupations. Veterinarians usually practice in animal hospitals or clinics and care primarily for small pets. Recent trends indicate particularly strong interest in cats as pets. Faster growth of the cat population is expected to increase the demand for feline medicine and veterinary services, while demand for veterinary care for dogs should continue to grow at a more modest pace.

Many pet owners consider their pets as members of the family, which serves as evidence that people are placing a higher value on their pets and is an example of the human-animal bond. These pet owners are becoming more aware of the availability of advanced care and are more willing to pay for intensive veterinary care than owners in the past. Furthermore, the number of pet owners purchasing pet insurance is rising, increasing the likelihood that considerable money will be spent on veterinary care.



More pet owners also will take advantage of nontraditional veterinary services, such as cancer treatment and preventive dental care. Modern veterinary services have caught up to human medicine; certain procedures, such as hip replacement, kidney transplants, and blood transfusions, which were once only available for humans, are now available for animals.

Excellent job opportunities are expected because there are only 28 accredited schools of veterinary medicine in the United States, resulting in a limited number of graduates—about 2,500—each year. However, admission to veterinary school is competitive.

New graduates continue to be attracted to companion-animal medicine because they usually prefer to deal with pets and to live and work near heavily populated areas, where most pet owners live. Employment opportunities are very good in cities and suburbs but even better in rural areas because fewer veterinarians compete to work there.