



# Health Careers In Alaska

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## Respiratory Therapist

Respiratory therapy is an important part of the multidisciplinary care team that treats patients with respiratory illnesses. During breathing emergencies, respiratory therapists perform procedures necessary for maintaining life. They help in reviving patients whose heart or lungs are not working properly (Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation or CPR), and they use specialized equipment to support patients' breathing (mechanical ventilators).

Respiratory therapists perform the following therapeutic modalities that assist patients in breathing: suctioning (to clear air passages of fluids and other materials), handheld nebulizer treatments (to deliver bronchodilators to open airways), Chest PhysioTherapy (CPT) (to help loosen and

mobilize secretions so patients can clear their airways), Incentive Spirometry (IS) (coaching patients to take a deep breath to prevent collapse of the alveoli), delivering medical gases (oxygen), and evaluating patient breathing status.

Respiratory therapists perform diagnostic studies: Pulmonary Function Tests (PFTs) (measuring the speed and amount of air exhaled), Arterial Blood Gases (ABG's) (drawing arterial blood to measure the patient's metabolic status), and Transcutaneous CO<sub>2</sub> monitoring (monitoring patient's CO<sub>2</sub> and making interventions when indicated). Respiratory therapists also educate patients and families on use of medications, disease processes, and Asthma.

## Respiratory Therapist Facts:

### Where do respiratory therapists work in Alaska?

In Alaska, respiratory therapists are usually employed in the larger regional hospitals that have intensive care units, newborn nurseries, surgery, and emergency rooms.

### Educational Requirements

- Graduation from high school with coursework in math, science, and English.
- Two-year Associate degree programs in respiratory therapy are available in many community colleges. Respiratory therapists who have an Associate's degree can enroll in shortened programs that allow them to complete a Bachelor's degree.
- Four-year Bachelor's degree programs are available at some colleges and universities. Most of the duties of the Associate and Bachelor's degree respiratory therapists are the same, but the Bachelor's degree will generally provide better career options.

### Hourly Wage Range:

\$24.01-\$35.76 (Mean \$30.64)

*\*based on Alaska DOL data*

### Years in School:

2-4 years (after high school graduation).

### Academic Programs in Alaska

There are no accredited respiratory therapy programs in Alaska. For a list of accredited programs in the U.S., visit the American Association of Respiratory Care's website: [http://www.aarc.org/education/accredited\\_programs/](http://www.aarc.org/education/accredited_programs/)

### State Contact:

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