

\$5.88 and \$7.26. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$5.49, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$10.15 per hour. For most waiters and waitresses, higher earnings are primarily the result of receiving more in tips rather than higher hourly wages. Tips usually average between 10 and 20 percent of guests' checks, so waiters and waitresses working in busy, expensive restaurants earn the most.

Bartenders had median hourly earnings (not including tips) of \$6.86 in 2000. The middle 50 percent earned between \$6.10 and \$8.44. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$5.59, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$11.14 an hour. Like waiters and waitresses, bartenders employed in public bars may receive more than half of their earnings as tips. Service bartenders often are paid higher hourly wages to offset their lower tip earnings.

Median hourly earnings (not including tips) of dining room and cafeteria attendants and bartender helpers were \$6.53 in 2000. The middle 50 percent earned between \$5.97 and \$7.62. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$5.54, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$9.26 an hour. Most received over half of their earnings as wages; the rest of their income was a share of the proceeds from tip pools.

Median hourly earnings of hosts and hostesses were \$6.95 in 2000. The middle 50 percent earned between \$6.18 and \$8.11. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$5.65, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$9.59 an hour. The majority of their earnings are received from wages. In some cases, wages were supplemented by a share of the proceeds from tip pools.

Median hourly earnings of counter attendants in cafeterias, food concessions, and coffee shops (not including tips) were \$6.72 in 2000. The middle 50 percent earned between \$6.07 and \$8.05 an hour. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$5.59, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$9.92 an hour.

Median hourly earnings of combined food preparation and serving workers, including fast food, were \$6.52 in 2000. The middle 50 percent earned between \$5.92 and \$7.52. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$5.51, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$8.64 an hour. Although some counter attendants receive part of their earnings as tips, fast-food workers usually do not.

Median hourly earnings of dishwashers were \$6.69 in 2000. The middle 50 percent earned between \$6.05 and \$7.86. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$5.58, and the highest 10 percent earned

more than \$8.81 an hour. Generally these are part-time positions receiving very low wages due to the nature of the work and automation.

Median hourly earnings of nonrestaurant food servers were \$7.07 in 2000.

In establishments covered by Federal law, most workers beginning at the minimum wage earned \$5.15 an hour in 2000. However, various minimum wage exceptions apply under specific circumstances to disabled workers, full-time students, youth under age 20 in their first 90 days of employment, tipped employees, and student-learners. Tipped employees are those who customarily and regularly receive more than \$30 a month in tips. The employer may consider tips as part of wages, but the employer must pay at least \$2.13 an hour in direct wages. Employers also are permitted to deduct from wages the cost, or fair value, of any meals or lodging provided. However, many employers provide free meals and furnish uniforms. Food and beverage service workers who work full time often receive typical benefits, while part-time workers usually do not.

In some large restaurants and hotels, food and beverage serving and related workers belong to unions—principally the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union and the Service Employees International Union.

Related Occupations

Other workers whose jobs involve serving customers and helping them enjoy themselves include flight attendants, tour and travel guides, and gaming services workers.

Sources of Additional Information

Information about job opportunities may be obtained from local employers and local offices of the State employment service.

A guide to careers in restaurants, a list of 2- and 4-year colleges that have food service programs, and information on scholarships to those programs is available from:

► National Restaurant Association, 1200 17th St. NW., Washington, DC 20036-3097. Internet: <http://www.restaurant.org>

For general information on hospitality careers, contact:

► International Council on Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Education, 3205 Skipwith Rd., Richmond, VA 23294-4442. Internet: <http://www.chric.org>

Healthcare Support Occupations

Dental Assistants

(O*NET 31-9091.00)

Significant Points

- Rapid employment growth and substantial replacement needs should result in good job opportunities.
- Dentists are expected to hire more assistants to perform routine tasks so that they may devote their own time to more profitable procedures.
- Infection control is a crucial responsibility of dental assistants. Proper infection control protects patients and members of the dental health team.

Nature of the Work

Dental assistants perform a variety of patient care, office, and laboratory duties. They work chairside as dentists examine and treat patients. They make patients as comfortable as possible in the dental chair, prepare them for treatment, and obtain dental records. Assistants hand instruments and materials to dentists, and keep patients' mouths dry and clear by using suction or other devices. Assistants also sterilize and disinfect instruments and equipment, prepare tray setups for dental procedures, and instruct patients on postoperative and general oral health care.

Some dental assistants prepare materials for making impressions and restorations, expose radiographs, and process dental x-ray film as directed by a dentist. They also may remove sutures, apply anesthetics to gums or cavity-preventive agents to teeth, remove excess cement used in the filling process, and place rubber dams on the teeth to isolate them for individual treatment.



Dental assistants hand instruments and materials to dentists and keep patients' mouths dry and clear.

Those with laboratory duties make casts of the teeth and mouth from impressions taken by dentists, clean and polish removable appliances, and make temporary crowns. Dental assistants with office duties schedule and confirm appointments, receive patients, keep treatment records, send bills, receive payments, and order dental supplies and materials.

Dental assistants should not be confused with dental hygienists, who are licensed to perform different clinical tasks. (See the statement on dental hygienists elsewhere in the *Handbook*.)

Working Conditions

Dental assistants work in a well-lighted, clean environment. Their work area usually is near the dental chair so that they can arrange instruments, materials, and medication and hand them to the dentist when needed. Dental assistants wear gloves, masks, eyewear, and protective clothing to protect themselves and their patients from infectious diseases. Following safety procedures also minimizes the risks associated with the use of radiographic equipment.

Almost half of dental assistants have a 35- to 40-hour work-week, which may include work on Saturdays or evenings.

Employment

Dental assistants held about 247,000 jobs in 2000. Almost 2 out of 5 worked part time, sometimes in more than one dental office.

Virtually all dental assistants work in a private dental office. A small number work in dental schools, private and government hospitals, State and local public health departments, or clinics.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Most assistants learn their skills on the job, though some are trained in dental assisting programs offered by community and junior colleges, trade schools, technical institutes, or the Armed Forces. Assistants must be a dentist's "third hand"; therefore, dentists look for people who are reliable, can work well with others, and have good manual dexterity. High school students interested in a career as a dental assistant should take courses in biology, chemistry, health, and office practices.

The American Dental Association's Commission on Dental Accreditation approved 248 dental assisting training programs in 2000. Programs include classroom, laboratory, and preclinical instruction in dental assisting skills and related theory. In addition, students gain practical experience in dental schools, clinics, or dental offices. Most programs take 1 year or less to complete and lead to a certificate or diploma. Two-year programs offered in community and junior colleges lead to an associate degree. All programs require a high school diploma or its equivalent, and some require a typing or science course for admission. Some private vocational schools offer 4- to 6-month courses in dental assisting, but the Commission on Dental Accreditation does not accredit these.

Some States regulate the duties dental assistants may complete through licensure or registration. Licensure or registration may require passing a written or practical examination. States offering licensure or registration have a variety of schools offering courses—approximately 10 to 12 months in length—that meet their State's requirements. Some States require continuing education to maintain licensure or registration. A few States allow dental assistants to perform any function delegated to them by the dentist.

Individual States have adopted different standards for dental assistants who perform certain medical duties, such as radiological procedures. Completion of the Radiation Health and Safety examination offered by the Dental Assisting National Board, Inc. (DANB) meets those standards in 31 States. Some States require the completion of a State-approved course in radiology as well.

Certification is available through DANB and is recognized or required in 20 States. Other organizations offer registration, most often at the State level. Certification is an acknowledgment of an assistant's qualifications and professional competence, and may be an asset when seeking employment. Candidates may qualify to take the DANB certification examination by graduating from an accredited training program or by having 2 years of full-time, or 4 years of part-time, experience as a dental assistant. In addition, applicants must have current certification in cardiopulmonary resuscitation. Recertification is offered annually for applicants who have earned continuing education credits.

Without further education, advancement opportunities are limited. Some dental assistants become office managers, dental assisting instructors, or dental product sales representatives. Others go back to school to become dental hygienists. For many, this entry-level occupation provides basic training and experience and serves as a steppingstone to more highly skilled and higher paying jobs.

Job Outlook

Job prospects for dental assistants should be good. Employment is expected to grow much faster than the average for all occupations through the year 2010. In addition, numerous job openings will occur due to the need to replace assistants who transfer to other occupations, retire, or leave the labor force for other reasons. Many opportunities are for entry-level positions offering on-the-job training.

Population growth and greater retention of natural teeth by middle-aged and older people will fuel demand for dental services. Older dentists, who are less likely to employ assistants, will leave and be replaced by recent graduates, who are more likely to use one, or even two. In addition, as dentists' workloads increase, they are expected to hire more assistants to perform routine tasks, so that they may devote their own time to more profitable procedures.

Earnings

Median hourly earnings of dental assistants were \$12.49 in 2000. The middle 50 percent earned between \$9.99 and \$15.51 an hour. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$8.26, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$18.57 an hour.

Benefits vary substantially by practice setting and may be contingent upon full-time employment. According to the American Dental Association's 1999 Workforce Needs Assessment Survey, almost all full-time dental assistants employed by private practitioners received paid vacation. The survey also found that 9 out of 10 full- and part-time dental assistants received dental coverage.

Related Occupations

Workers in other occupations supporting health practitioners include medical assistants, occupational therapist assistants and aides, pharmacy aides, pharmacy technicians, physical therapist assistants and aides, and veterinary technologists, technicians, and assistants.

Sources of Additional Information

Information about career opportunities and accredited dental assistant programs is available from:

► Commission on Dental Accreditation, American Dental Association, 211 E. Chicago Ave., Suite 1814, Chicago, IL 60611. Internet: <http://www.ada.org>

For information on becoming a Certified Dental Assistant and a list of State boards of dentistry, contact:

► Dental Assisting National Board, Inc., 676 North Saint Clair, Suite 1880, Chicago, IL 60611. Internet: <http://www.danb.org>

For general information about continuing education for dental assistants, contact:

► American Dental Assistants Association, 203 North LaSalle St., Suite 1320, Chicago, IL 60601. Internet: <http://www.dentalassistant.org>

Medical Assistants

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Significant Points

- Medical assistants is expected to be one of the fastest growing occupations through the year 2010.
- Job prospects should be best for medical assistants with formal training or experience.

Nature of the Work

Medical assistants perform routine administrative and clinical tasks to keep the offices and clinics of physicians, podiatrists, chiropractors, and optometrists running smoothly. They should not be confused with physician assistants who examine, diagnose, and treat patients under the direct supervision of a physician. (Physician assistants are discussed elsewhere in the *Handbook*.)

The duties of medical assistants vary from office to office, depending on office location, size, and specialty. In small practices, medical assistants usually are "generalists," handling both administrative and clinical duties and reporting directly to an office manager, physician, or other health practitioner. Those in large



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practices tend to specialize in a particular area under the supervision of department administrators.

Medical assistants perform many administrative duties. They answer telephones, greet patients, update and file patient medical records, fill out insurance forms, handle correspondence, schedule appointments, arrange for hospital admission and laboratory services, and handle billing and bookkeeping.

Clinical duties vary according to State law and include taking medical histories and recording vital signs, explaining treatment procedures to patients, preparing patients for examination, and assisting the physician during the examination. Medical assistants collect and prepare laboratory specimens or perform basic laboratory tests on the premises, dispose of contaminated supplies, and sterilize medical instruments. They instruct patients about medication and special diets, prepare and administer medications as directed by a physician, authorize drug refills as directed, telephone prescriptions to a pharmacy, draw blood, prepare patients for x rays, take electrocardiograms, remove sutures, and change dressings.

Medical assistants also may arrange examining room instruments and equipment, purchase and maintain supplies and equipment, and keep waiting and examining rooms neat and clean.

Assistants who specialize have additional duties. *Podiatric medical assistants* make castings of feet, expose and develop x rays, and assist podiatrists in surgery. *Ophthalmic medical assistants* help ophthalmologists provide medical eye care. They conduct diagnostic tests, measure and record vision, and test eye muscle function. They also show patients how to insert, remove, and care for contact lenses; and they apply eye dressings. Under the direction of the physician, they may administer eye medications. They also maintain optical and surgical instruments and may assist the ophthalmologist in surgery.

Working Conditions

Medical assistants work in well-lighted, clean environments. They constantly interact with other people, and may have to handle several responsibilities at once.

Most full-time medical assistants work a regular 40-hour week. Some work part-time, evenings, or weekends.

Employment

Medical assistants held about 329,000 jobs in 2000. Sixty percent were in physicians' offices, and about 15 percent were in hospitals, including inpatient and outpatient facilities. The rest were in nursing homes, offices of other health practitioners, and other health care facilities.