

Royal College Spring 2020 Examinations: Frequently asked questions

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Timing and delivery format of exams

Why did the Royal College postpone the spring 2020 written examination dates?

With the World Health Organization’s declaration of a COVID-19 pandemic and the rapidly evolving situation in Canada—and with the safety of our candidates, examiners, staff and public in mind—the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, in consultation with the deans of all 17 medical schools, has made the difficult decision of postponing the delivery of the spring 2020 certification exams to September 2020 at the earliest. Medical regulatory authorities (MRA) have confirmed that the spring 2020 cohort of graduating residents must pass the pan-Canadian certification exams in order to be independently licensed to practise.

The Royal College standards for certification align with the MRA requirement for licensure. As long as exams are required, the Royal College will ensure that they are delivered fairly and safely. We stand with our academic partners and are committed to delivering the spring 2020 exams in the most responsible way possible.

Why can’t residents write their exams before the summer?

Our priority is the wellness of residents and the Canadians they are caring for. It is anticipated that as this pandemic evolves, the care residents provide to patients will be more and more essential.

What is the proposed approach for the fall 2020 examination dates for spring 2020 candidates?

As we plan for a new fall exam timeline, we have heard from many of you—we have heard about your concerns, your thoughts and your ideas for how to make this all work in these challenges times. The Royal College is very grateful for this input and collaboration, as we work together to find solutions to this unprecedented challenge with your safety and future success in mind.

The Royal College is pleased to introduce a four-point plan to deliver the spring 2020 exams this fall, in response to these extraordinary times:

1. **Oral exams will not be required for the spring 2020 cohort.** The spring 2020 candidates will not need to complete the oral component of the comprehensive exam.

The written exam format (MCQ, SAQ) and length will be unchanged and continues to be based on the objectives of training of the discipline.

Before the exam (*requirements*):

- Signed re-affirmation from your program director that you have met the required competencies to attempt the written exam will be needed. This will be organized between the Royal College and Canadian universities for the spring 2020 candidates.
- If you are a repeat exam taker, international medical graduate or U.S. graduate, you will have to provide the necessary documentation for re-affirmation from an appropriate supervisor.

Write the written exam: You will then take a written exam. If you pass the written exam, you will be immediately certified.

For those who fail the written exam: If you do not pass the written exam, you will not be eligible for certification this year and will need to apply again next year; however, you will not exhaust an attempt in sitting this exam. We have extended everyone who was exam eligible in spring 2020 an extra year of eligibility.

- 2. We will inform you of the dates for the exams.** We have set a goal of September 2020 for the exam, and will be in a position to give you firm dates once we have confirmed the sites where these exams will be held. We commit to providing a minimum of 6 weeks' notice. We will be monitoring progress on COVID-19 and making the necessary logistical adjustments, if needed.
- 3. Test sites will be expanded so you can take the exam closer to home.** We previously had 14 test sites across the country. Together with our academic and health partners, we are expanding the number of test sites to allow residents to take the exam as close to their home or work place as possible. Test sites will adhere to ongoing physical distancing protocols. We will provide more information on test locations once we have confirmed them with our partners.
- 4. Fees for the oral exam will be refunded to you.** We will reimburse your oral exam fee as quickly as possible. We will expedite these refunds to get the \$2,215 fee back to you within the next 60 days, which will be refunded to your credit card.

What are the NEW written examination dates?

The Royal College is currently working to secure venues and a revised schedule to administer the spring 2020 exams in the fall. We hope that, at that time, the Canadian pandemic will be resolving. We are committed to providing dates, once we have secured locations with our partners, and to providing candidates with adequate time to prepare.

If the spring examinations are being delayed to the fall, does that impact the timing of the 2020 subspecialty examinations?

At this moment, the timing of the fall 2020 subspecialty exams is being evaluated based on the ongoing development of COVID-19 and a recognized priority to administer the spring 2020 exams. Further communication will be shared as it becomes available.

How will my Canadian program director re-affirm that I have met the required competencies to attempt the written examination?

All program directors will receive a letter asking them to re-affirm; no action will be required by first-time exam candidates.

If I am a repeat exam taker or international medical graduate from a residency program outside of Canada, what re-affirmation documentation is required? Should the documentation be completed by my fellowship program director or residency program director?

You will be provided with an attestation letter to be signed. If you have recently (less than three years ago) graduated from a jurisdiction-approved or U.S. residency program, your program director can attest to your competencies. Alternatively, a recent fellowship director can serve for the attestation, or someone who has served as a supervisor and/or accountable for your practice in the last year. This attestation must be returned to the Royal College by August 1, 2020, to maintain eligibility for the postponed spring 2020 examinations.

If I am an international medical graduate or U.S. graduate and am in practice in Canada, who will attest that I have met the required competencies to attempt the written examination (as stated in the requirements)?

You will be provided with an attestation letter to be signed. We will require the signature of someone who has supervision or accountability over your practice, such as a clinical supervisor, department head or chief of staff. This attestation must be returned to the Royal College by August 1, 2020, to maintain eligibility for the postponed spring 2020 examinations.

If I am an international medical graduate, U.S. graduate or a repeat exam candidate and am in a Canadian residency program, who will attest that I have met the required competencies to attempt the written examination (as stated in the requirements)?

We require a signed re-affirmation from your program director that you have met the required competencies to attempt the written exam will be needed. This will be organized between the Royal College and Canadian universities for the spring 2020 candidates. This attestation must be returned to the Royal College by August 1st, 2020 to maintain eligibility for the postponed spring 2020 examinations.

Will this certification, granted by written examination only, have limitations?

No. For this year only, if a spring 2020 cohort resident meets the criteria for certification listed above, the resident will be deemed certified by the Royal College.

Why can't the Royal College administer the written examinations online/by computer?

Computer-based exams require third-party software, platforms and facilities to ensure their security. Due to COVID-19 protocols, third-party providers cannot adhere to the safety and security standards of the Royal College at this time.

The Medical Council of Canada (MCC) and the College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC) have computer-based exams, which need to be administered in a secure test facility. The MCC and CFPC have also postponed their spring exams. As the COVID-19 situation continues to evolve, test centres may also be affected by closures due to physical distancing restrictions.

The Royal College's written exams are paper-based, which allows us more flexibility and responsiveness to postponement in dates than computer-based exams at this time.

Why is it not possible to have residents write examinations onsite, if program directors were to sign an agreement to uphold the integrity of the examinations?

Written administration on university sites is a solution being explored; however, with the uncertain duration of the COVID-19 crisis, universities are currently challenged to commit these venues. The administration of written exams requires a coordinated effort to ensure that all exams from a specific discipline are administered, across five time zones, at the same time and in the same manner. Variations to any part of the process could impact a candidate and their results. This strict administration process also upholds the validity and reliability of the exam, and ensures the integrity of the assessment and that all content and documents are secured.

In these extenuating circumstances, why aren't you creating an alternative pathway to certification that doesn't require examination?

Specialist certification through a pan-Canadian examination is a requirement of medical regulatory authorities for a full, unrestricted license to practise in Canada. Please contact your local [medical regulatory authority](#) for more information.

Will I be able to get a special license to practise?

We anticipate that as this pandemic evolves, the care residents provide will be more and more essential. Provincial regulatory authorities have confirmed they have mechanisms to provide graduating residents with provisional/temporary/restricted licenses to practise,

given the unexpected and necessary postponement of exams and certification. Provisional and restricted licensing will vary by location. Please contact the appropriate [medical regulatory authority](#) for more details.

Will there be any flexibility offered with regards to the new spring 2020 examination schedule, such as a choice between two exam dates in the fall, so we can keep commitments that were made prior to the schedule change?

As with the current process, the rescheduled written exam dates will be selected to allow for administration of the written exam for a given specialty on a single date, to ensure the validity and integrity of the exam.

Can I sit for my subspecialty examination if I haven't yet written my specialty examination because it was postponed as a result of the pandemic (e.g. write the Medical Oncology exam prior to the Internal Medicine exam)?

The Royal College already has a process in place by which a resident can appear for a subspecialty exam prior to a primary exam. Certification and Fellowship will only be conferred upon success at both exams.

Withdrawals, deferrals and refunds

Will I be refunded my examination fees for this postponement?

The Royal College still intends to administer the spring 2020 cohort written exams in the fall. We will, however, immediately be issuing a refund of \$2,215 for the oral exam within 60 days of April 9, 2020.

If, for whatever reason, you are unable to attend your exam on the rescheduled date or decide to withdraw this year for any COVID-19 related reason, you will be offered a FULL refund.

With the decision to remove the oral component of the examination for spring 2020 candidates, will I be getting a refund for the part of the exam fee I paid?

Yes. You will be refunded \$2,215 from the cost of the \$4,415 exam fee that you have paid. Since this exam is now a written-only exam, only the written exam fee of \$2,200 will apply.

Do I have to apply to receive my refund for the oral examination component?

No. All candidates that were registered for the spring 2020 exams will be automatically refunded.

When can I expect the refund for my oral examination component and how will it come?

The refunds are expected to be completed within 60 days of this announcement (April 9, 2020). Your refund will be in the same form of payment that you used. If you paid via a credit card, the refund will be processed using that same credit card number.

What happens if I withdraw from the spring 2020 examination process?

If you decide to withdraw from the spring 2020 exam process for any reason related to COVID-19, including feeling too overwhelmed by the situation, you will be granted a FULL refund. This withdrawal will not count as an exam attempt and will not alter your exam eligibility.

If I don't elect to defer my written examination and I am unsuccessful at my final attempt, will the Royal College grant me another year of eligibility due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Spring 2020 candidates wishing to defer their Royal College written exam in 2020 may withdraw at any time, at no cost and for any COVID-19 related reason. In the case of withdrawal, it will not be considered as an exam attempt. Candidates who do present to the exam but are unsuccessful will not be eligible for certification this year, and will need to apply again next year; however, you will not exhaust an attempt in sitting this exam. We have extended everyone who was exam eligible in spring 2020 an extra year of eligibility.

Impacts of postponements on licensing, further training

How will a postponed examination cycle impact my license to practise?

We have been working with the [Federation of Medical Regulatory Authorities of Canada](#) to understand how residents can extend their licenses and continue to care for patients without interruption. Graduating residents will be eligible for a provisional / temporary / restricted license in a Canadian province provided that they have (1) confirmation of completion of postgraduate training, (2) notice of eligibility to take the certification exam and (3) understand that they must take the certification exam at the earliest opportunity. Learn more: <https://fmrac.ca/licensing-the-2020-graduating-cohorts/>

For specific information on any other requirements or conditions, all trainees are invited to consult the website of their provincial or territorial medical regulatory authority. Visit www.fmrac.ca/members for contact information.

How will a postponed examination cycle impact my subspecialty training or fellowship placement?

Starting subspecialty or fellowship training should not be dependent on the successful completion of the Royal College exams and related certification. Subspecialty exams will be granted in the same year as primary exams, if necessary.

What about residents who will be going to the U.S. in June/July to pursue additional training or to work? How will this postponement impact ECFMG or state boards (provisional licensing is not enough – Royal College certification is required)?

We suggest that all trainees contact their planned training programs for direction on process and the right authority with whom to discuss their options.

International medical graduates

Given the postponement of spring 2020 examinations, what are the options for international medical graduates? Many are applying from another country and don't have program directors in Canada to validate their work in other places.

We are reviewing the challenges that international medical graduates are facing, including their ability to secure the appropriate documentation and the impacts of potential travel restrictions. There is no single answer to this question since each individual situation may differ and need to be addressed on a case-by-case basis. We will continue to work with our stakeholders to support international medical graduates through this situation, and to help minimize the impact to them.

If there are still international travel restrictions in place when the written examinations are scheduled to occur in the fall, what alternatives will be available for international medical graduates who must travel to Canada from other countries?

We do not have remote exam delivery capabilities at this time. Exams will be offered in Canada only. We will work with exam candidates to find solutions to their individual

situations. If deferral is required, there will be no impact on these candidates' exam eligibility or number of attempts towards certification.

If I am an international medical graduate from a residency program outside of Canada, who will attest that I have met the required competencies to attempt the written examination (as stated in the requirements)?

You will be provided with an attestation letter to be signed. If you have recently (less than three years ago) graduated from a jurisdiction-approved or U.S. residency program, your program director can attest to your competencies. Alternatively, a recent fellowship director can serve for the attestation, or someone who has served as a supervisor and/or accountable for your practice in the last year. This attestation must be returned to the Royal College by August 1, 2020, to maintain eligibility for the postponed spring 2020 examinations.

If I am an international medical graduate in practice, who will attest that I have met the required competencies to attempt the written examination (as stated in the requirements)?

You will be provided with an attestation letter to be signed. We will require the signature of someone who has supervision or accountability over your practice, such as a clinical supervisor, department head or chief of staff. This attestation must be returned to the Royal College by August 1, 2020 to maintain eligibility for the postponed spring 2020 examinations.

Special accommodations

I'm pregnant and the revised exam schedule coincides with my due date. Will there be special accommodations provided to me?

Per our usual deferral policy, any exam withdrawals that need to be made (e.g. due to pregnancy or childbirth) will be honoured, without any impact to a candidate's eligibility or counts against their attempts at certification. All exam fees will also be fully reimbursed. To request a refund of exam fees, contact us at candidates@royalcollege.ca.

Measures to protect exam candidates

Will I be able to sit my written examination if I am either self-quarantined or quarantined?

This fall, the safety of our candidates, examiners and staff will continue to be our top priority. Candidates who are quarantined pose a risk to that safety and would need to defer their exam to the next opportunity. Candidates will be screened at registration as to their status (including recent symptoms, travel history and care of COVID-19 related patients without personal protective equipment). We expect candidates to adhere to professional codes of conduct and public health directives, and not to present for the exam if they are quarantined or symptomatic for potential COVID-19.

Will personal protective equipment (PPE) be available at my written examination?

Some PPE equipment and sanitizer will be available to candidates at their exams for use at their discretion, depending on supply and availability. The Royal College has distributed its current supply to health care institutions to manage the evolving COVID-19 crisis.

We are open to other ideas for what would be most helpful. Please email your suggestions to communications@royalcollege.ca.