

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT VETERINARY MEDICINE

What is “Veterinary Medicine?” Veterinary medicine is the medical treatment of animals – basically, veterinarians are doctors for animals.

Why do people become veterinarians? The number one reason is because they love animals. They also like solving problems and finding out how to fix problems. They like science and math and want to help people and animals stay healthy. They like working with animals and people.

What’s the best thing about being a veterinarian? Helping animals stay healthy. It’s a great feeling knowing you’ve helped a pet live longer so it can have a longer, happier life with its family, or knowing that you’re making the world safer for animals and people.

What was the first animal domesticated by humans? It was the dog, about 15,000 years ago.

Are there more pet dogs or pet cats in the United States? There are more cats. There are more than 70 million pet cats, and there are 62 million pet dogs in the United States.

What are the possible career paths for veterinarians?

- 1) **Private Practice:** These vets work with all different kinds of animals from cats and dogs to horses, pigs and cows to sharks, elephants and tigers. Some vets will get more education to practice in a specific area like surgery or behavior or study diseases of a specific part of the body like the heart, kidneys or eyes.
- 2) **Academia/Academic Medicine (Teaching & Research):** These vets teach veterinary medicine to students. They can work in laboratories and conduct research. Some vets will care for the research animals as well.
- 3) **Regulatory Medicine:** These vets work to keep our food animals, like chickens, cows, fish, goats, pigs and sheep, safe and healthy. They inspect animals that come into the United States to make sure that they are not sick, so we do not get sick.
- 4) **Public Health:** These vets work to study, control and prevent animal diseases that can be passed to people, like rabies and West Nile Virus. They also examine safety of medicines and food additives, and they examine the effects of pesticides and other pollutants on people and animals.
- 5) **Uniformed Services:** U.S. Military veterinarians monitor diseases like West Nile Virus, HIV-Aids and manage vaccination programs for illnesses. They provide medical care for U.S. military animals and U.S. military personnel-owned pets and help to educate people and establish animal health programs around the world (for example: they helped to rebuild the Baghdad Zoo).

- 6) **Private Industry:** These veterinarians test and supervise the production of drugs, such as antibiotics, and vaccines for people and animals.

...but these 6 paths don't cover it all. There are other specialty areas for veterinarians like animal welfare and forensic medicine (the "CSI vets"). There are even veterinarians in government, including the U.S. Congress!

Will there always be a need for veterinarians? Yes. As long as people have animals as pets, as long as people eat meat and drink milk, and as long as there are diseases that need cures and vaccinations to prevent them, there will be veterinarians. As long as there are people and a need for human medicine, there will be a need for veterinary medicine.

If I am interested in becoming a veterinarian, what can I do now? In high school, you should take science and math classes to make sure you like the subjects – veterinarians use their science and math skills every day. You may also want to join a 4-H club or the Future Farmers of America (FFA) to get valuable experience with animals as well as develop your leadership and team skills. You can volunteer or work at an animal hospital, clinic or shelter, animal rescue, animal control or humane society. When you're in college, join a pre-vet club.

How much school does it take to become a veterinarian? After high school, you will need to go to college for about 4 years. After that, you can apply for veterinary college. Veterinary school usually takes about 4 years to complete. After you graduate, you need to pass national and state board exams before you can practice veterinary medicine. If you decide you want to be a specialist in a certain area of medicine, you'll need to get some additional training and schooling after you've graduated from vet school, which might include an internship, residency, or graduate program and could take 1-5 years to complete.

Is it hard to be accepted into veterinary school? Veterinary school can be hard to get into since many students are trying to get in and there are more students than available spaces for them. To better your chances, study hard in math and science and get some veterinary or animal related experience before you apply.

How many veterinary schools are there in the United States? In the US, there are 28 schools. There are also veterinary schools in other countries. If you want to work in veterinary medicine, but you do not want to go to vet school, there are veterinary technician and distance learning programs available, too.

Do vets make a lot of money? There's a wide range of salaries for veterinarians, depending on what they do, where they are, how much experience they have, whether or not they own their own practice, etc. They can make a good living, and some do very well. It's not likely to make you a millionaire, but vets really love what they do and they can make a good living and support their families.

Ask your veterinarian or contact the American Veterinary Medical Association with any other questions:

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