

NCLEX : One step in ensuring safe care

What is the NCLEX?

The National Council Licensure Examination – Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN) is an entry-to-practice examination for those applying to become a registered nurse (RN) in Ontario. It tests for knowledge, skills and judgement nurses need at the beginning of their careers.

Who has to take it?

Most people planning to register as an RN in Ontario must first pass the [NCLEX-RN](#) exam as well as meet additional requirements to become a member of the College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO).

Why do we need an entry exam?

Registration exams, such as the NCLEX-RN, contribute to patient safety. The NCLEX-RN exam tests whether the writer has knowledge, skill and judgment needed to provide safe care during their first year of practice in Ontario. As the provincial regulator of the nursing profession, we are accountable for ensuring that only those who demonstrate the ability to apply nursing knowledge and provide safe care are able to practise in Ontario.

What is the NCLEX-RN testing?

The NCLEX-RN does not test everything taught during a four-year baccalaureate nursing program. Rather, the NCLEX-RN focuses on testing entry-level knowledge – what nurses need to know to provide safe care at the beginning of their careers in Ontario. For example, it asks questions about whether an applicant is able to: assess a patient's health care needs and respond to any changes they see; evaluate a patient's need for pain management; safely administer medications; and maintain client confidentiality and privacy. It does not test the writer's knowledge of a particular health care system, history or legislation. All drug names are generic and refer to medications that Canadian entry-level nurses are expected to know. Measurements in metric are provided, as well.

The competencies being tested are taught in Canada's

nursing programs. A national Canadian practice analysis, which is conducted every three years, identified the knowledge, skills and abilities required of Canadian nurses in the first year of practice, and confirmed that the NCLEX-RN is a valid test of these competencies.

How was it developed?

Canadian nurses and Canadian nurse regulators from the 10 provinces/territories using the test participated in the development of the NCLEX-RN currently in use. They continue to participate in its review to ensure it meets the needs of regulators and does not bias Canadian writers. The National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) developed the NCLEX-RN test to be a psychometrically sound and legally defensible examination consistent with current nursing practice. The College of Nurses of Ontario and other provinces/territories began using the NCLEX-RN as the RN entry-to-practice exam in January 2015.

Are Canadian nursing educators involved in reviews of the exam?

Canadian nurses, including clinical educators, participated in reviewing the content for the NCLEX-RN currently in use. They continue to participate in its review and development to ensure it meets our needs as regulators and the needs of the public for safe nursing care. Canadian nurse volunteers are periodically sought to review the NCLEX-RN; more information is available in the [Volunteer section](#) of CNO's website.

Who administers it?

The NCLEX-RN is administered by the NCSBN, which has a proven track record of developing computer-adaptive exams. The exam portal is administered by [Pearson VUE](#), a provider of computer-based testing.

Are the exam and its content American?

The NCLEX-RN does not test knowledge of health care systems, history, cultural issues, or government policy and laws. Not only do such items vary by province and territory in Canada, they vary across states in the U.S.

While a nurse working in any specific jurisdiction would have to know about the health care system in which they are working, including its legislation, testing for that knowledge is not the purpose of the NCLEX-RN. Applicants to the College of Nurses of Ontario write a [jurisprudence exam](#) that tests for this knowledge.

What is being done to ensure the test continues to meet Canadian standards, terminology and procedures?

Canadian nurses in the 10 provinces/territories using the test participated in the development of the NCLEX-RN currently in use, and continue to participate in its review to ensure it meets the needs of Canadian exam writers and is free of bias. All drug names are generic and refer to medications that entry-level nurses are expected to know. Measurements in metric are provided, as well.

Why did Ontario change to the NCLEX-RN?

As Ontario's nursing regulator, we're accountable for ensuring that registration is granted to only those who demonstrate the nursing knowledge to provide safe care. We regularly review processes for assessing this knowledge in order to determine the most accessible, fair and efficient approaches. The NCLEX-RN meets our requirement for being a valid exam that also meets the needs of writers, such as year-round access to the exam and faster issuing of exam results.

What is a computer-adaptive exam?

Computer-adaptive testing (CAT) is the format of the NCLEX-RN exam. In CAT, the program determines the level of difficulty of the question it presents to the writer based on how well they responded to the preceding question. For example, if a writer responded correctly to a question of medium difficulty, the next question presented will be slightly more difficult. This [video](#) will provide you with more information about CAT and its use in the NCLEX-RN.

What information was provided to educators and schools?

Canadian regulators announced the change to the NCLEX-RN in December 2011, and the exam was launched on January 1, 2015. From 2012 to 2014, educators had access to several resources through CNO and NCSBN to give them the information they needed

to prepare students for the exam. These resources included: webinars, regularly updated FAQs, a quarterly NCLEX newsletter, a series of conferences organized by NCSBN, and links to resources (through NCSBN), such as: test plans, information about CAT, and an online course, *Understanding the NCLEX*.

What is being done to ensure students have what they need to take the exam?

The exam tests basic competencies taught in Canada's nursing school programs. As the regulator, our requirement for this entry-to-practice exam is not to test all that educators have taught in their four-year curriculum. Essential topics in the exam content include: pain management; medication administration; basic care and comfort; safety and infection control; and, health promotion and maintenance.

Students preparing for the exam should refer to the following:

- [Test Plans](#), which provide information about the exam structure, the content areas that will be tested and the administration of the exam
- The [Review for the NCLEX-RN Examination](#) course provides a review of the exam and allows writers to prepare at their own pace. (Note: there is a cost to use this resource.)
- A video and list of questions and answers that explains the [computer-adaptive format](#) of the NCLEX-RN.

Why doesn't CNO provide students with exam prep materials?

CNO provides information about the format of the exam and the topic areas covered. To maintain the integrity of the exam, CNO does not participate in developing preparatory courses. A student's nursing education and the resources mentioned above should be enough to help them prepare for the NCLEX-RN.

Third-party vendors offer NCLEX-RN preparation courses; these courses are not associated with or endorsed by the College of Nurses of Ontario or the exam provider. No third party has access to the NCLEX-RN question bank, and exam writers should be wary of any party claiming to have such access. We are aware of "American" content in some preparation courses. However, please note that the exam is not

testing the writer's knowledge of a particular health care system, history or legislation.

What was the ultimate 2015 pass rate?

In 2015, of those who wrote the NCLEX-RN one, two, or three times, about 84% had passed by the end of the year. Of those who were unsuccessful by the end of 2015, some still had exam attempts remaining (at the time, they could attempt the exam three times).

Exam writers now have no limits on the number of exam attempts they can make.

For more information on the 2015 Ontario NCLEX-RN pass rate, see the [Nursing Registration Exams Report 2015](#) on CNO's website

What is the ultimate pass rate for French language exam writers?

The 2015 ultimate pass rate for the NCLEX-RN written in French was 50%. We recognize that the pass rate is low, and we're working with government and educators to help determine the cause. A rigorous translation process is used to develop the French version of the exam. It is conducted by Canadians using federal translation standards, and exam items are reviewed by a translation panel consisting of three to six Canadian bilingual RNs. These RNs are required to be fluent in French and English, and to be practising in a bilingual facility or setting.

What happens if a student fails the NCLEX-RN?

Writers who make an unsuccessful attempt on the NCLEX-RN are provided with a Candidate's Performance Report (CPR). This report provides them with information about how they did in each test section of the exam. The [After the Exam](#) page on the NCSBN's website includes information about using this report to help prepare for another writing attempt. In Ontario, there is no limit on the number of times an applicant can attempt to write the NCLEX-RN.

Is public safety affected by having no limits on the number of times a writer can attempt the exam?

The public's safety is not impacted by this change in the number of exam writes. The safety and security features built into the NCLEX-RN help to ensure that a nurse's ability to provide safe care is not impacted by the number

of attempts they take to pass exam. Due to the type of exam being used, a writer can only pass it once they have gained the needed level of knowledge, skill and judgement.

For more information

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