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# Retraining Guidelines for medical laboratory technologists

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## Introduction

Medical laboratory technologists (MLTs) gain authorization to practice in a specialty listed in Schedule 1 of Ontario Regulation 207/94, under the *Medical Laboratory Technology Act, 1991* (MLT Act), by meeting the registration requirements listed in the same regulation. MLTs have the responsibility to maintain competence in the specialties in which they are authorized to practice. In some instances, although MLTs are authorized to practice in more than one specialty, their professional practice is focused on only one specialty. When the opportunity, or requirement, presents itself for an MLT to practise in a specialty in which they have not practised for three years or more, they are responsible for assessing their own competence and their need to retrain in that specialty.

When engaging in retraining, the MLT must ensure the public is protected from harm. The goal of this guideline is to ensure MLTs involved in retraining activities can practise competently, safely, and ethically, minimizing the risk of harm to patients. Competence is defined as demonstrating current and relevant knowledge, skill and judgment, and using professional attitudes and behaviors to practice medical laboratory technology.

The scope of this guideline is for MLTs currently authorized to practice in a given specialty, and who self-identify a need for retraining. This guideline is not meant to deal with MLTs who are seeking authorization to practice in specialties they are not currently authorized to practice in.

While regulatory bodies, employers, unions, administrators, and MLTs may have different expectations when it comes to deciding on the minimum length of time required for retraining to achieve the desired level of competence, these guidelines are based on criteria established by the medical laboratory technology profession. They are designed to formally and consistently address stakeholder expectations.



## A framework for the retraining of MLTs

### Legal expectations

Ontario Regulation 207/94, made under the *Medical Laboratory Technology Act, 1991* (MLT Act), includes the following statement regarding specialties:

5. The following are the terms, conditions and limitations of a certificate of registration of any class:
  2. If the member is authorized to practise in one or more specific specialties, subspecialties or former specialties or subspecialties of medical laboratory technology, the member shall perform only procedures within the specified specialty, specialties, subspecialty, subspecialties, former specialty or former subspecialties, as the case may be.

Authorization to practice in a given specialty or specialties comes from meeting the registration requirements in O.Reg. 207/94. Once authorization is granted, the CMLTO Standards of Practice outline the professional responsibilities regarding MLT professional practice and ongoing competence expectations:

Medical Laboratory Technologists shall:

- Practice within the scope of their professional competence and adhere to institutional and laboratory policies and ensure processes are performed according to approved procedures.
- Assume responsibility for professional development and invest time, effort and resources to maintain and enhance competence in areas of professional practice.

The workplace and educational institutions have important roles to play in retraining MLTs, guided by the expectations of competence as defined in national competency profiles:

- Generally, the primary site of MLT retraining is the individual's workplace. It provides the trainee with the necessary training materials and consistent practical education in a supportive environment. Workplace retraining is supported by established processes and procedures set out by laboratory accreditation requirements related to training and competence evaluation.



- The specialty-specific recommended retraining time periods represent feedback from the Ontario Medical Laboratory Science Programs.
- The competencies expected of an entry-level MLT are outlined in the discipline-specific competency profiles published by the Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science (CSMLS). The College recognizes these competency profiles as the standard by which one of the CMLTO registration requirements are met, enabling members to be authorized to practice in a given specialty. These documents may serve as a valuable guide to MLTs involved in retraining within a single specialty, or multiple specialties.

### Approaching MLT retraining

The ultimate goal of retraining in a designated specialty is that an MLT can function as an independent, competent professional. While retraining methods may be influenced by local laboratory processes and procedures, and enabled by educational institution input, the following points provide a high-level approach to MLT retraining.

- Prior to initiating any retraining activities, a pre-assessment of needs, undertaken by the MLT and the workplace, is strongly recommended. The pre-assessment should take into consideration scope of testing, complexity of the instrumentation or technique, and the MLT's prior theoretical and practical training.
- Successful retraining must include both a theoretical and practical component, followed by a formal competence assessment. This is the joint responsibility of the MLT undergoing retraining and the workplace.
- CMLTO's *Guidelines for supervision* define "supervision," in the context of an MLT's professional practice, as the act of monitoring and directing the professional practice of another individual to ensure the provision of safe, high-quality laboratory services by the individual being supervised, in accordance with laws and institutional policies and procedures. The amount and type of supervision required for an MLT involved in retraining depends upon many factors, including the type of task assigned and competence of the MLT being retrained.



- Specific guidelines and checklists to cover all aspects of job performance should be available in each specialty to ensure that learning objectives are met.
- At the end of the retraining period and after having followed the training protocol, competence must be assessed and documented using consistent and fair methods.

### **Responsibilities of MLTs involved in retraining other MLTs**

MLTs who participate in retraining MLTs must:

- be in good standing with the CMLTO
- have, and maintain, competence in the area(s) in which retraining is provided
- identify any personal conflicts of interest with the MLT being retrained
- have authorization to practice in the specialty in which they are retraining another MLT
- be comfortable assessing their own knowledge, skills, and judgment, as well as evaluating the knowledge, skills and judgment of others
- adapt to retraining situations in a manner consistent with their responsibilities as members of a self-regulating profession
- keep in mind that patient/client needs are paramount and must be considered in all decisions made relating to the responsibilities assigned to MLTs involved in retraining
- ensure the MLT follows safe work practices
- accept responsibility for judging the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the MLT, prior to assigning responsibilities to the MLT
- provide constructive feedback to the MLT during retraining
- try to establish a supportive and professional relationship with the MLT being retrained
- maintain documentation of all retraining activities and outcomes.



### MLT responsibilities when retraining in a specialty

MLTs who engage in retraining must:

- take responsibility for maintaining and improving their competence
- have been previously qualified to practice the specialty and hold this specialty on their certificate of registration
- self-assess their competence and the requirement to be retrained. Realize that retraining is recommended for MLTs who have not practiced in the new area of practice or the core lab setting, in the previous three-year period or more frequently depending on local needs
- maintain documentation of all retraining activities and outcomes.
- be open to receiving constructive feedback.

### Specialty-specific recommended retraining time periods

The curriculum for retraining should include all aspects of the job performance within a particular workplace. In addition to clinical training, this could include relevant policies and procedures in safety, customer service, the Laboratory Information System (LIS), and quality assurance.

Specialty	Minimum recommended retraining time period	Special consideration(s)
Specimen procurement / Specimen referral	Two (2) weeks full-time retraining	Includes phlebotomy, if required.
Microbiology	Six (6) weeks full-time retraining	Minimum of two (2) weeks for core laboratory work.
Histology	Four (4) weeks full-time retraining	Includes one (1) week of special and/or immunohistochemistry stains.



<b>Specialty</b>	<b>Minimum recommended retraining time period</b>	<b>Special consideration(s)</b>
Transfusion Science	Four (4) weeks full-time retraining	Additional two (2) to four (4) weeks for complex procedures and investigations, if required.
Chemistry	Four (4) weeks full-time retraining	Additional weeks may be required dependent on the variety and complexity of analyzers. Two (2) weeks orientation and training is generally recommended per high volume, fully automated, analytical instrument.
Hematology	Four (4) weeks of full-time retraining for basic core component and hematology instrumentation.	Includes both particle counters and automated coagulation analyzers. An additional two (2) weeks of full-time retraining is recommended to learn blood film assessment, body fluid analysis and miscellaneous tests.

The information presented in the table above represents minimum retraining time periods. Individual needs, as outlined in this guideline, need to also be taken into consideration when defining and implementing a retraining plan.



## **Conclusion**

MLTs embarking on retraining in a specialty must be aware of the legal, regulatory, employment, and labour union requirements and expectations before beginning retraining. Public protection is an MLT's mandate and must be the foremost consideration in retraining approaches.

In conjunction with the CMLTO Standards of Practice, Code of Ethics, and other CMLTO Practice Guidelines, this document supports, but does not replace, the professional judgment of MLTs involved in retraining other MLTs.

The CMLTO is available to provide guidance to members retraining other MLTs, consistent with the RHPA, the MLT Act and Regulations under which we operate.

If you have questions about this document, or about the professional, legal, or ethical obligations of an MLT, please contact the CMLTO by email at [memberrelations@cmlto.com](mailto:memberrelations@cmlto.com).