

Paediatricians in Canada: Frequently asked questions



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What is a paediatrician?

Paediatricians are specialists in child and youth health. They are medical doctors who have at least four years additional training after medical school in the care of infants, children and adolescents.

Some paediatricians go on to specialize even further in a particular area. They are known as subspecialists. Some of the many examples include paediatric cardiologists, paediatric surgeons, paediatric allergists, neonatologists and developmental paediatricians. There are many others.

Canadian paediatricians practice in many different settings:

- Some provide primary care in the community, which means they do preventative care as well as see children and youth who are sick. They are also called community paediatricians and may work part-time in hospitals.
- Some paediatricians provide what is called 'consulting care.' They see patients who have been referred to them by other doctors for help in diagnosing and organizing treatment for more serious problems.
- Many paediatricians, particularly subspecialists, work in hospitals or clinics.
- Others teach in medical schools or do research.

Many paediatricians play more than one of these roles. For instance, they may have teaching and hospital duties as well as an office practice.

Paediatricians are also often active outside the medical setting. Many are passionate advocates for the health of children and youth, and spend time talking to local media, giving presentations to community or parents groups or talking to local politicians about improving services for children and youth.

Sometimes you may also see the word "pediatrician." This is the American spelling. Paediatricians in the United States play a somewhat different role

than they do in Canada as they are largely responsible for primary care of children and youth.

What do paediatricians do?

Paediatricians provide a wide variety of services for children, youth and their families. Their work with patients runs the gamut from taking care of a seriously ill newborn baby to treating a teenager who's been involved in a car accident.

Most paediatricians do one or more of the following:

- **Primary health care:** Paediatricians provide day-to-day care to help sick children get better and to prevent healthy children from getting sick. This includes conducting physical exams, diagnosing and treating problems, providing education and advice, and administering immunizations.
- **Management of chronic illness:** Many paediatricians take care of children with complex medical needs, including long-term disabilities or conditions such as diabetes, cystic fibrosis or asthma. They also provide care for the families of these children.
- **Health promotion:** Paediatricians provide advice and guidance on issues such as injury prevention, nutrition, physical activity and behaviour. They do this in their offices, through the media, and by working with other health care professionals, the public and government.
- **Evaluation and assessment:** Paediatricians check to ensure that children are reaching appropriate developmental milestones – that their growth and development are progressing as it should. Paediatricians can also determine whether a child needs to be seen by another health professional for more specialized or targeted services.
- **Researching new treatments:** Paediatricians conduct research that contributes to new

treatments and approaches for disorders in babies, children and youth.

- **Evaluating treatment measures:** Paediatricians assess current therapies and approaches for paediatric disorders to make sure they are appropriate.

Does every child in Canada have a paediatrician?

It's estimated that between 30% and 40% of children's visits to a doctor for primary health care are to a paediatrician. The majority, then, see a family physician for their ongoing health care.

Part of this is explained by the fact that there are only about 2300 practicing paediatricians in all of Canada and, as described above, many of them provide specialty care.

The availability of a paediatrician also depends on what region of the country you live in. In cities like Ottawa, Toronto and Winnipeg, and in the province of Quebec, it's common for children to see paediatricians for their routine care. But children in British Columbia, the Maritimes and areas outside large urban

centres see family physicians, who refer children with more complex medical needs to paediatricians.

How do you find a paediatrician?

If you live in an area where paediatricians commonly provide primary care, there are a few ways to find one:

- **Word of mouth:** Ask friends and family members with children about their paediatricians.
- **Provincial colleges:** Each province has a college of physicians and surgeons, which grants licenses to doctors to practice. Many of the colleges have referral services to help people find doctors accepting new patients. Visit <www.caringforkids.cps.ca/resources/finddoc.htm> for links to these services.
- **Referrals:** In some areas, you will need a referral from a family doctor to see a paediatrician.

Source: Developed by the Canadian Paediatric Society Public Education Subcommittee.

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