

March 17 Update on Royal College Exams

Postponement of spring 2020 written examinations

- The March written exam dates have been postponed for the safety for our candidates, examiners and staff, and to comply with Public Health Agency of Canada guidelines.
- We are actively working to secure venues and a revised schedule to administer the written examinations. We plan to secure locations in cities where medical schools are based, thereby mitigating travel for the candidates and ensuring their safety while applying the appropriate social distancing.
- Postponed **March examinations** will be targeted for administration over the month of May.
- **April examinations** are targeted to start in their already scheduled **last week of April** but will be spread over more days into the month of May.
- We are committed to a minimum 4 weeks' notice in advance of all exam dates, including exams that we hope to schedule for the last week of April. We are committed to a minimum 4 weeks' notice in advance of all exam dates.
- We are planning to post the schedule for all other exam dates by April 1.

Oral/OSCE exams

- The administration of oral/OSCE exams is dependent on examiners, who are experts in their disciplines. At this point in time, their travel to Ottawa is restricted by health authorities/universities that need them to stay local to ensure an adequate workforce for a potential surge in care needs.
- Oral/OSCE examinations must be postponed until travel by examiners is possible or alternate channels for administration can be organized.
- Successful written results will stand alone and will not need to be repeated in the event of a deferral or unsuccessful attempt of a 2020 oral/OSCE examination.

Frequently asked questions

Why is the Royal College postponing the spring 2020 written exam dates?

With the escalation of the COVID-19 situation to a pandemic and directives for social distancing from the Public Health Agency of Canada, we are concerned for the safety of our candidates, examiners, staff and public health. Most of our planned sites for administration of the spring 2020 written examinations would put us in violation of those directives. We are currently trying to secure sites where we can minimize the number of people gathered at one time and adhere to social distancing recommendations, to enhance the safety of all those involved in our examination processes. This will also mean increasing the number of dates our exams are

offered, so that fewer disciplines write on the same date, and increasing the number of sites to mitigate travel for most candidates.

In 2020, why can't the Royal College administer the written examinations by computer?

The Royal College is working towards administering computer-based exams in the next few years but we are not ready now. Similar to our partners at the Medical Council of Canada (MCC) and the College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC), a computer-based exam would need to be administered in a secure test facility. The MCC and CFPC have also postponed their examinations. As the situation continues to evolve, test centres may also be affected by closures due to travel and work bans. Even if possible, computer-based exams, in our circumstance, would still have resulted in the same postponements this year, likely without the opportunity to try to reschedule this spring.

Will I be refunded for my examination fees for this postponement?

The Royal College still intends to administer the spring 2020 examinations. If, for whatever reason, you are unable to attend the examination on the rescheduled date(s) or decide to withdraw this year for any COVID-19 related reason, you will be offered a FULL refund.

Should I cancel my travel and any accommodations for the 2020 written and oral exams?

Both exam components (written and oral) will happen on alternate dates to those originally scheduled. In this unprecedented situation, most airlines and hotels are offering full refunds or credit for changes related to COVID-19. You should contact the airline(s) and hotel(s) you booked with for more details

What are my NEW written exam dates?

The Royal College is currently working to secure venues and a revised schedule to administer the 2020 written examinations. We anticipate that we will administer the exams in every city where Canadian medical schools are based. We are planning to increase the number of sites and dates for administration of these examinations, to adhere to Public Health Agency of Canada guidelines for social distancing. We are committed to providing at least four weeks' notice in advance of any new written examination date, including exams that we are planning to deliver in the last week of April. We intend to have the full schedule of exam dates posted by April 1.

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

The safety of our candidates, examiners and staff is our top priority. Candidates who are quarantined pose a risk to that safety and would need to defer their examination to the next opportunity. Candidates will be screened at registration as to their status (including recent symptoms, international travel and care of COVID-19 related patients without personal protective equipment). Avoidance of high-risk activities in the two-week period before the rescheduled exam dates is also suggested. We expect candidates to adhere to professional codes of conduct, and not to present for the examination if they are quarantined or symptomatic for potential COVID-19.

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

PPE and sanitizer will be available to all candidates at their examination for use at their discretion.

If the written examinations are being delayed, does that impact the timing of the 2020 applied (oral/OSCE) exams?

In short, yes. Delivery of the oral/OSCE component of the Royal College exams is heavily dependent on travel and administration by experts in Royal College speciality disciplines. As the COVID-19 situation has been unfolding, we have received notifications that many universities and hospitals are requesting limits on the travel of health care personnel to ensure an adequate workforce for a potential surge in care needs. With limited examiners, in addition to adherence to social distancing directives, postponing the oral/OSCE has become necessary.

When will the 2020 applied (oral/OSCE) exam components be offered?

This component of the Royal College exams is dependent on the availability of expert faculty. These experts are currently required by their health systems to deliver care and, in some jurisdictions, have been directed not to travel. As this situation is evolving, we are unable at this time to do any definitive planning until the crisis slows and some of the aforementioned public health directives are lifted. While we are looking at the possibility of holding these exams in the summer and fall of 2020, the evolution of the COVID-19 situation will dictate what is feasible.

In 2020, why can't an oral/OSCE exam be administered remotely (e.g. with video conferencing)?

Objective structured clinical examinations (OSCEs) are not all well-suited to a video-based format. For example, some applied exams involve interaction with a standardized patient to test clinical examination skills, meaning these exams wouldn't adhere to the social distancing directives meant to protect candidates, standardized patients and staff.

We are currently exploring alternate channels for the delivery of oral scenarios; however, determining the operations and logistics to securely administer and proctor an OSCE exam by alternate channels — given our breadth of candidates, disciplines and jurisdictions — would have still necessitated the postponement of such exams during this COVID-19 situation.

Why can't I be certified on the basis of my written result only?

The Royal College has a duty to assess and certify the competence of specialist physicians and surgeons. The provincial regulatory authorities consider Royal College certification, through examinations, as the gold standard to issue a license to practise. Eliminating a component of our examination process would significantly alter those well-established standards, which have been validated across our various disciplines, that are integral to upholding public trust. If an exam component were to be removed in the future, it would need to be backed by evidence, with preserved validity in the process, and requiring a deliberate and planned approach.

What if I need to defer my oral/OSCE exam until 2021?

Successful written results will stand alone and will not need to be repeated in the event of a deferral or unsuccessful attempt of a 2020 oral/OSCE examination. Prior to this situation, the committees of the Royal College had already approved moving away from a comprehensive exam approach, where written examination results would be separate from applied results and where candidates would need to demonstrate success on their written exam before presenting for the applied. This new decoupled approach has already been implemented in three disciplines: Psychiatry, Pediatrics and Internal Medicine. Given these extraordinary circumstances, we are advancing this application to all disciplines for the 2020 cycle, so that successful written results will not need repeating.

How will a postponed exam cycle impact my license to practice?

The provincial regulatory authorities are responsible for licensing/registration of physicians, and their legislative requirements vary slightly by province/territory. Provincial regulators have signalled that eligibility for Royal College examination (as opposed to successful completion of these exams) can be considered as meeting a requirement for a provisional licence/registration until the exams can be taken and certification awarded. The provincial authorities are aware of this unprecedented situation and will be communicating their plans directly in their jurisdictions.

How will a postponed exam cycle impact my subspecialty residency or fellowship placement?

Starting subspecialty or fellowship training should not be dependent on the successful completion of the Royal College examinations and related certification. In these extraordinary times, programs around the world are aware of the COVID-19 situation and we expect are sensitive to the circumstances preventing definitive examination and certification. Subspecialty examinations will be granted in the same year as primary exams, if necessary.

What happens if I withdraw from the 2020 exam process?

We recognize the challenges you may be facing in these extraordinary times. If you decide to withdraw from the 2020 examination 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 also not count as an exam attempt and will not alter your exam eligibility.