

Public Health Microbiologist Training – Frequently Asked Questions

What training is required for Public Health Microbiologist (PHM) certification?

In general, PHM certification requires at least 6 months (26 weeks) of full-time training as a Public Health Microbiologist Trainee, covering a list of required topics in microbiology and diagnostic immunology, in a public health laboratory approved by the California Department of Public Health Laboratory Field Services (LFS) for such training. Some applicants with extensive clinical laboratory experience might be eligible for a reduction in the training requirement, and should contact LFS for information on what evidence of experience should be submitted to be considered for this reduction.

When does PHM training taking place?

Some counties train independently “as needed”; other counties train as a group. The PHM group training is held for approximately six and a half months full time, typically December through June. Training hours are 8am-5pm, Monday-Friday. Some trainings at local county labs may have shorter hours, e.g. 10am-3pm.

When and where is the PHM exam offered?

Laboratory Field Services (LFS) administers the PHM exam at least two times per year, usually in late winter and late summer. Exams are offered in both Los Angeles and Richmond. Typically, LFS offers one or two additional exam dates as needed at other times during the year.

What is the training format?

PHM training consists of 24 Units of instruction provided over at least 26 weeks. Each Unit covers a different required topic, and has its own assignments and final exam. The final grade for the Unit is a combination of attendance, participation, performance evaluations, assignments, laboratory exercises, and final exam. Performance evaluations can include, but are not limited to work habits, attendance, technical skills, interpersonal and communication skills. Trainees must successfully complete each Unit by 70% or greater final grade in order to be admitted to the certification exam. Each Unit will be offered only once during the training, and trainees are expected to attend every Unit, so we do not recommend scheduling vacations during the training. The training is very fast-paced and covers a large amount of material at the graduate level, so trainees are expected to study for 2-3 hours every night in order to keep up with the pace of instruction.

Where is the training located?

Some counties train independently “as needed”; other counties have some shared training or train as a group. Group trainings may be located in several county laboratories, and the state laboratory in Richmond. Trainees are expected to arrange their own transportation to attend training Units in the location where they are offered.

Will textbooks be provided?

Recommended references for training are the current editions of the Manual of Clinical Microbiology and the Control of Communicable Diseases Manual. These textbooks will be available as resources, and some counties may purchase these textbooks for their trainees. In addition, each Unit will have handouts or binders as appropriate.

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How are trainees chosen?

PHM training candidates are selected by county laboratories through competitive interviews, and evaluated according to a combination of interview performance, skills and credentials. PHM trainees may be volunteers, stipend-funded or laboratory-funded. Being selected as a PHM Trainee is not a guarantee of future employment.

What is the training stipend?

A very limited number of training stipends will be awarded. This year, there are 12 training stipends total for the State of California. The training stipends are grant funds that allow county labs to pay PHM Trainees approximately \$16.00-\$20.00 per hour. The paid hours may be full-time or part-time depending on the home laboratory. Stipend-paid trainees are not permanent employees and do not receive any benefits, but must turn in time sheets to be paid.