

Gaining Exposure to Veterinary Medicine

Veterinary experience is an important part of veterinary school preparation. In addition to didactic coursework, veterinary students will be spending significant time in clinical clerkships. Early exposure to the field of veterinary medicine will provide applicants with knowledge of the industry, hands-on experiences, and development of technical skills related to the field.

Veterinary Experience vs. Animal Experience

Veterinary experience must be medical experience. This could include clinical experience or experience in a medical research laboratory, and may include shadowing, volunteering, or paid experience with veterinarians and/or medical researchers. We recommend a minimum of 500 hours of this type of experience.

Animal experience may also be included on an application to veterinary school. These experiences will be related to animal husbandry, and may include showing animals in competitions, caring for animals in a barn or animal rescue/shelter, and volunteering at a zoo or aquarium.

Where can I find opportunities?

Reach out to veterinarians in your community to see what opportunities they might be willing to provide. Shadowing in a hospital, riding along with a large animal veterinarian, and even regular volunteering and paid employment may be options.

Your undergraduate institution may be a good resource as well. Joining a pre-veterinary club on your campus can help you to make contacts and learn about different opportunities. Contacting professors and researchers can also provide opportunities to work in a research lab, gaining valuable laboratory skills for individuals interested in pursuing a career in research.

Never be afraid to ask! Even if job postings aren't listed, you may find a veterinarian willing to help a future colleague.

Why is veterinary experience important?

Having the opportunity to work hands-on in the field of veterinary medicine is extremely valuable for a prospective veterinary student. These opportunities should provide you with skill sets and knowledge related to lab work, handling of animals in the veterinary setting, important protocols related to veterinary medicine and/or research, and issues facing the industry. These experiences will allow you to be prepared for the DVM program requirements as well as help to guide you in choosing how you plan to practice veterinary medicine.

It is also important to develop a mentorship relationship with a veterinarian. Not only will this help to foster your interests in particular areas of veterinary medicine, but you will be required to have a letter of recommendation submitted by a veterinarian on your behalf. The longer you know and have worked with a veterinarian, the more solid your letter will be. Having an advocate in the field will be important as you prepare for your career.

