

Helping Your Teen Explore Veterinary Medicine

A practical guide for Ontario parents

For many young people, the dream begins with a love of animals. Veterinary medicine offers the chance to turn that love into a rewarding career, helping animals while supporting the people who care for, love, and depend on them. It's a profession full of discovery, problem-solving, and meaningful connections. If your teen is curious about this path, high school is a wonderful time to explore what the work is really like and imagine the difference they could make.

The pathway at a glance

1 High school	2 University	3 Veterinary college
Build a broad academic foundation and explore the profession.	Complete at least four full-time undergraduate semesters and the required university courses before applying to OVC.	If admitted, complete the four-year Doctor of Veterinary Medicine program, then meet licensing requirements.

Important: Students do not apply to the Ontario Veterinary College directly from high school. OVC does not require a particular undergraduate major; the student's program must allow them to complete the required university-level courses and meet the full-time study rules.

What can your teen do in high school

- Choose courses that keep science-based university programs open. Biology and chemistry are especially useful, while mathematics, English and other subjects help develop the quantitative and communication skills used in the profession. University admission requirements vary, so confirm them for every undergraduate program being considered.
- Develop sustainable study habits. Veterinary medicine is academically demanding, but sleep, relationships, interests and wellbeing matter too.
- Explore more than companion-animal practice. Veterinarians work with livestock, horses, wildlife, laboratory animals and aquatic species, and in public health, government, food safety, research, industry, academia and animal welfare.
- Build people skills through employment, teams, clubs, caregiving, community service or leadership. Veterinary medicine involves frequent communication, teamwork and emotionally difficult decisions.

There is no single perfect undergraduate program

Help your teen choose a program in which they can do well and that gives them another satisfying direction if their plans change. A science or animal-focused degree may be a natural fit, but OVC permits prerequisites to be completed within a bachelor's or graduate degree program in any area of study. Before accepting an offer, students should map the OVC prerequisites against the university's course sequence and rules.

Exploring the Profession Thoughtfully

The goal is informed exploration, not collecting the largest number of hours. OVC currently sets no minimum number of veterinary, animal or extracurricular experience hours. It does expect applicants to understand the profession and reflect meaningfully on what they have learned.

Helpful ways to explore

Type of exploration	What it can teach
Veterinary settings	Job shadowing or paid or volunteer work under a veterinarian in clinical practice, research, shelters, rehabilitation, public health, government or industry.
Animal experience	Work or volunteering with farms, stables, shelters, wildlife organizations or other settings that expose the student to different species and responsible animal care.
People and community	Customer service, coaching, team activities, community volunteering and leadership that develop reliability, empathy, communication and teamwork.
Conversation and reflection	Speaking with veterinarians about both rewarding and difficult parts of the work, then recording what surprised the student and what they still want to learn.

Questions worth asking a veterinarian

- What does a typical day involve, including the work clients may not see?
- Which parts of the job are most satisfying and most demanding?
- How much of the work involves people, communication and teamwork?
- What career paths exist outside companion-animal practice?
- What do you wish you had understood before veterinary college?

Signs the career may be a good fit

Look for a growing combination of strengths, not perfection: scientific curiosity, careful observation, integrity, compassion, dependability, communication, teamwork, willingness to learn, problem-solving, and the ability to recover from setbacks. OVC identifies interpersonal skills, leadership, cultural humility, community-mindedness, self-regulation and resilience among the non-academic qualities important to the program and profession.

What the work really involves

- Caring for animals while also guiding and communicating with the people responsible for them.
- Making decisions with incomplete information and balancing medical, ethical and financial considerations.
- Encountering illness, injury, euthanasia and grief, alongside prevention, recovery and long-term relationships.
- Continuing to learn throughout a career as medicine, technology and professional responsibilities evolve.

Planning for University and Veterinary School

Admission is competitive

Meeting the minimum requirements does not guarantee admission. OVC reviews both academic and non-academic preparation. For current applicants, academic eligibility includes at least four full-time undergraduate semesters, eight prerequisite courses, and minimum averages of 75% in both the prerequisites and the last four acceptable full-time semesters. The applicant pool is highly competitive, so families should always verify the requirements that apply in the student's future application year.

Make finances part of the plan early

Plan for the entire educational pathway: undergraduate study first, followed by four years of veterinary college if admitted. Include tuition and compulsory fees, housing, food, books, technology, transportation, clinical clothing or equipment, application costs and placement-related travel.

Current reference point: for 2025–26, published University of Guelph tuition and compulsory fees for domestic Ontario students in the 2023–2025 DVM cohorts totalled \$13,235.87 for the fall and winter semesters. This does not represent a future quote and does not include a student's earlier undergraduate education or living costs.

Funding sources to investigate

- University entrance awards, in-course scholarships and need-based bursaries
- OSAP grants and loans, if eligible
- RESPs, family savings and summer or part-time earnings
- Community, employer and professional-association awards
- Professional student lines of credit, only after comparing interest, repayment terms and co-signer requirements

A useful family exercise: build an annual cost-of-attendance budget, separate non-repayable aid from loans, estimate total borrowing and test future monthly payments using conservative income assumptions. Revisit the plan each year because fees and financial-aid rules change.

How parents can help

- Be curious before being directive. Ask what your teen is learning about the profession, not only whether they still want the title.
- Support study habits and wellbeing rather than treating every grade or activity as an admissions test.
- Help identify safe, accessible experiences. Avoid assuming expensive camps or travel are necessary; OVC does not set a minimum experience-hour requirement.
- Let the student make contact, follow up and reflect. Those steps help build the independence and professionalism they will need.
- Keep other strong career options open. A changed direction is useful information, not failure.

A simple family checklist

- ☐ Review Grade 11 and 12 course choices against several possible undergraduate programs.
- ☐ Compare undergraduate programs for fit, cost, support and room to complete OVC prerequisites.
- ☐ Arrange a conversation or experience with at least one veterinarian and explore more than one area of the profession.
- ☐ Start a simple experience and reflection log.
- ☐ Create a realistic education budget and review funding options.
- ☐ Check official admission information again before every major course or application decision.

Reliable Sources and Next Steps

Veterinary admission requirements can change. Use this sheet as a starting point and rely on official sources when making course, application or financial decisions.

OVC DVM application and admission requirements

Academic requirements, experience categories, application cohorts and selection information. [Visit the official website](#)

University of Guelph DVM program overview

Curriculum, accreditation and examples of clinical and non-clinical career paths. [Visit the official website](#)

University of Guelph tuition and fees

Published tuition and compulsory fees by program and cohort. [Visit the official website](#)

Ontario Student Assistance Program

Current information about OSAP eligibility, applications, grants and loans. [Visit the official website](#)

College of Veterinarians of Ontario

Licensing information for people planning to practise veterinary medicine in Ontario. [Visit the official website](#)

Questions for the next family conversation

1. Which parts of veterinary medicine interest you most? What would you like to understand better?
2. What kind of university environment would help you learn and stay well?
3. What experience could give you a more realistic view of the profession?
4. Which skills would you like to strengthen this year?
5. What education costs should we begin planning for together?

Prepared for families of Ontario high school students

Information reviewed September 2026. Always confirm current requirements, fees and deadlines with the responsible institution.