

Apply to university medicine programmes with the IB DP

A guide for counsellors and students



International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme (DP) students have many accessible pathways to studying medicine at universities all over the globe.

This guide will cover:

- The difference between undergraduate and graduate medicine programmes
- How to customize your DP to best prepare for studying medicine at university
- What you need to apply and study medicine in various individual countries

Undergraduate versus graduate medicine programmes

In general, there are two main paths of study to becoming a doctor.

1. Complete your medicine programme straight after high school at the undergraduate level.
2. Complete an undergraduate degree—often in a life sciences field—and then start a medicine programme at the graduate level.

The path a student takes will depend on their personal needs and on the country where they want to study medicine. Some countries offer both options, but many only offer one entry point. The ratios of places available may vary significantly, particularly for international students. **Knowing which path a student aims to take is essential in planning IB studies.**



Undergraduate

Undergraduate medicine programmes are designed to begin directly after secondary school. This is why **it is crucial for students on this path to choose appropriate DP subjects**: Undergraduate admission to medicine considers IB subjects and IB scores along with admissions tests and interviews.

Students applying to an undergraduate path should be certain they want to pursue medicine as a career. A student may perform well academically, especially in sciences, but still may not be sure if they want to be a doctor. In this case, they might find more flexibility by taking the graduate path. This way, they have the length of their undergraduate degree to decide whether to pursue medicine.

Graduate

Graduate medicine programmes are designed to begin after a student has already earned their undergraduate degree. In countries with graduate entry points, many students focus their bachelor's degrees on medicine-related fields like biology or chemistry. Graduate admission focuses on undergraduate GPA and major, as well as admissions tests and interviews. While DP subject choice may not be considered as strongly by graduate admissions offices, **it is still important to choose subjects that prepare students for scientific study.**

How to customize your DP to best prepare for studying medicine

One important step in preparing to study medicine at university is **choosing which DP subjects to take**. Different countries and universities have varying policies on which DP subjects are required or preferred—or not permitted—for entry to medicine programmes. Selecting an appropriate combination of subjects for the country or university where a student wishes to study is critical.

How do I begin choosing DP subjects?

Each IB student has the opportunity to tailor their DP studies as closely to their interests and goals as possible.

In addition to the DP core, students choose the six DP subjects they will take during their two years in the programme. Often, this is one subject from each of the IB's six subject groups. They also must choose which level of the subject to take—standard level (SL) or higher level (HL). Each student takes a minimum of three or a maximum of four subjects at HL and the remaining at SL.

The selection of DP subjects available to students depends on what subjects their IB World Schools offer.



Watch a video overview
of how to choose your
DP subjects

Learn more about the
DP core and subjects



What DP subjects do I need to take to study medicine at university?

Some countries have **DP subject requirements** that students must meet to be eligible for admission to universities. Students should always visit the IB's Recognition Statements Database at recognition.ibo.org to check the requirements of the country where they wish to study. This will determine their eligibility to apply to universities—and medicine programmes—there. Students should also check individual university websites for required courses, as requirements may change from year to year.

Key subject group: Sciences

For IB students interested in medicine, it likely will be beneficial—or even required in many cases—to take **HL science subjects**, particularly biology or chemistry. Students are able to replace their arts group with an additional science subject for more study in the field.

The depth of learning in these HL science subjects will help students build a foundation of scientific expertise that helps in preparation for medical studies. Taking these subjects at HL also demonstrates to universities that students have chosen the most academically rigorous course available to them.

Studies in language and literature

Spanish A: language and literature SL

Language acquisition

English B HL

Individuals and societies

History SL

Sciences

Chemistry HL

Sciences

Biology HL

Mathematics

Mathematics: analysis
and approaches SL

Extended essay

Biology



Example of subject combination for an aspiring doctor

Remaining subject groups

Subject selection for the remaining subject groups typically is more flexible, but in some cases, it depends on country or university requirements. The information below is general advice, and you can find more country-specific information at the end of this guide.

It also is important to note that medicine programmes in some countries require applicants to have completed a certain amount of work experience before they apply.

Mathematics

Countries or individual universities may specify

- whether SL or HL is required or preferred
- whether mathematics: analysis and approaches (AA) or mathematics: applications and interpretations (AI) is required or preferred.

Some countries or universities accept all four mathematics courses, while others are more restrictive.

Language acquisition and studies in language and literature

Medicine programmes typically do not have language course requirements. However, a university may have *general* language proficiency requirements that list the required DP subject and level. Students may need to take a specific language proficiency exam to meet these requirements, such as [IELTS](#), [DELTA](#), [TEST-DAF](#) or others. In some cases, they may be able to use certain DP language subjects to demonstrate proficiency in a language (read more at ibo.org/university-admission/cefr).

Individuals and societies

Medicine programmes typically do not have individuals and societies requirements, but students should check if their desired country of study has overarching restrictions on which subjects are permitted for university entrance. Where allowed, individuals and societies subjects can be valuable to a student's applications to medicine programmes: They may be able to demonstrate their ability to consider ethical issues, balance arguments and draft essays.

Arts

Medicine programmes typically do not have arts requirements, and students can substitute an additional science subject for their arts subject. Where allowed, arts subjects can be valuable to a student's applications to medicine programmes: They may be able to demonstrate students' dedication to projects, attention to detail, or even manual dexterity.

Non-regular diploma

In certain countries, students need to take biology, chemistry, physics **and** mathematics for entry to medicine programmes. This need cannot be met with the standard DP subject structure. The **non-regular diploma** allows students to adjust their DP subjects to meet these requirements.

Most commonly, students replace the individuals and societies group with a third science subject. Alternatively, it is possible to take a seventh DP subject; however, this normally is not recommended due to the additional workload.

If schools can schedule the subjects, the IB programme coordinator submits a request to the IB on the student's behalf. The coordinator provides evidence that a student needs to take the non-regular diploma.

Non-regular diploma fast-track scheme

When a student wishes to apply to a medicine programme in one of the countries in Table 1, it is certain that they will need to make adjustments to their DP. Coordinators can submit a request for the *fast-track scheme* of the non-regular diploma. In these cases, no documentation is required.

Table 1

Finland	India	Kuwait
Nepal	The Netherlands	Pakistan
Portugal	Saudi Arabia	Sweden



If you are an IB educator at an IB World School with access to My IB, you can find more information about the non-regular diploma on the [Programme Resource Centre](#).

How can the DP help me stand out when I apply to medicine programmes?

While DP subjects in science will give students the **depth of knowledge** they need to be prepared for university medicine programmes, students' other subjects and the DP core will give them the **breadth of experience and personal development** they need.

The DP core challenges students to think critically, engage with their communities and solve problems. These are all skills that are essential for those practicing medicine—and skills that DP students already have. Students can showcase these character traits in applications and interviews. For example:

- Interest in and concern for all people
- Understanding of medical ethics
- Interest in medical research and contemporary issues in medicine
- Willingness to engage with and learn from a range of healthcare professionals
- Ability to lead a balanced life with regular and valuable ways to relieve stress



Managing student expectations

Understanding the level of competition

Admission to medicine programmes typically is very competitive: Everyone who applies to medicine programmes is a high-achieving student. Some countries and institutions also place restrictions on the number of places available to international students.

Students should research medicine programmes carefully and ensure they prepare thoughtfully over time; seek advice from counsellors, teachers and universities; and have a strategic approach to maximize the possibility of successful admission.

What if I'm not accepted into an undergraduate medicine programme?

University medicine programmes are competitive wherever a student wishes to study. Many students experience two university application cycles before they gain a place in a programme. This is not uncommon, and it is not always a reflection of a student's aptitude for practicing medicine.

Students who do not gain admission to an undergraduate medicine programme also can consider completing a medicine-related undergraduate degree, such as biochemistry. Then, they can apply to graduate medicine programmes.

It seems to be taking a long time to get an offer, and students applying to other subjects already have theirs. What do I do?

Applications to medicine programmes often follow a different timeline than programmes in other fields. As the process may involve admissions tests, in-person or virtual interviews, students are likely to receive responses later than their classmates.

How do I deal with a heavy workload while applying for medical school?

Applying to medicine programmes is an exciting process, though students may feel stressed or overwhelmed at times while they balance their applications with their course load. There are a few key ways to manage a heavy workload:

- **Manage time wisely:** Create a weekly plan that breaks large projects into smaller tasks. Keep your plan flexible and make space for rest, hobbies and friends.
- **Prioritize self-care:** Eat well, stay active and get at least seven hours of sleep each night.
- **Build a stress-relief toolkit:** Find activities that help you relax or feel energized. This might be drawing, sports, journaling, meditation or anything else you enjoy.
- **Use your support network:** Ask for help if you are feeling overwhelmed. Go to people you trust, like teachers, friends or family.

The IB has research and resources on well-being available for schools to assess and improve the well-being of their school community at ibo.org/research/wellbeing-research.

Do I need the DP to access medicine programmes?

For entry to medicine programmes in many countries, the DP is the most widely recognized IB programme. There are significant restrictions for admission to medicine programmes for students who have completed the Career-related Programme or fewer than six DP courses. Table 2 on the next page provides an overview of undergraduate medicine programme requirements in various countries.



For detailed guidance on applying to undergraduate and graduate medicine programmes in nearly 20 countries, visit our country-specific medicine programme application guides.



Table 2: Entry requirements for undergraduate medicine programmes

Country/ Region	TYPICALLY required DP subjects	Medicine-specific admissions test	Language of instruction
Australia	Chemistry HL and Biology SL/HL	Yes	English
Brazil	Follow guidance on pages 3–5	No	Portuguese
Caribbean	Chemistry HL and Biology HL	No	English, French, or Spanish
Central and Eastern Europe	Follow guidance on pages 3–5	Yes	English or local languages
Egypt	Chemistry HL and Biology HL	No	English
France	Follow guidance on pages 3–5	No	French
Germany	Mathematics AA or AI SL/HL and One HL from: Chemistry, Biology, Physics	Not required, but preferred	German
Hong Kong	Chemistry HL essential; Biology HL also preferred	No	English (Chinese proficiency also required)
India	Non-regular diploma needed	Yes	English; limited options in Hindi and local languages
Ireland	Chemistry HL and One HL from: Biology or Physics	Yes	English
Mexico	Follow guidance on pages 3–5	No	Spanish
Netherlands	Non-regular diploma needed	Yes	Dutch
Singapore	Chemistry HL and One HL from: Biology or Physics	Yes	English
South Africa	Chemistry HL, Biology HL, Mathematics HL	No	English
Spain	Follow guidance on pages 3–5	No	Spanish
Switzerland	One HL from: Chemistry, Biology, Mathematics AA or AI, Physics	Required by some universities	French or German
United Kingdom	Chemistry HL and Biology HL	Yes	English
Non-regular diploma required for			
Finland	India	Kuwait	
Nepal	Netherlands	Pakistan	
Portugal	Saudi Arabia	Sweden	

Students and counsellors should always check individual university websites for the latest and most up to date information on admission requirements.