

INFECTION PREVENTIONISTS:

Healthcare Specialists Dedicated to Infection Prevention and Control

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that on any given day, 1 in 31 hospital patients and 1 in 43 nursing home residents has an infection while being treated in a medical facility. Healthcare-associated infections claim the lives of tens of thousands of Americans each year and have devastating effects on physical, emotional, and financial health.

INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL IS A GROWING FIELD

COVID-19 has highlighted the critical importance of infection prevention and control, and in particular, the role that infection preventionists (IPs) play in preparing healthcare facilities for infectious disease threats and keeping infections from spreading both inside and outside of healthcare. The need for IPs is great and is poised to expand further to cover the growing demand for IPs in hospitals, nursing homes, outpatient clinics, home care, public health, education, and business settings.

IPs are healthcare professionals with specialized training and certification in infection prevention and control. They are the only specialists in healthcare dedicated primarily to preventing infections. IPs collaborate throughout the facility ensuring compliance with public health and regulatory standards, pandemic management, staff education, construction management, water quality, environmental disinfection, ventilation and airflow systems, antibiotic stewardship, instrument sterilization, and more.

In their roles, IPs often:

- Look for patterns and spot clusters of infections in healthcare facilities; in particular, they are focused on infections caused by antibiotic-resistant organisms and/or those associated with invasive procedures and indwelling devices.
- Track infection data and activities to prevent healthcare-associated infections.
- Integrate evidence-based infection prevention practices into facility-wide policies, guidelines, protocols, and educational strategies.
- Work with clinical teams to limit unnecessary antimicrobial use to prevent the spread of antimicrobial resistance.
- Educate healthcare personnel and the public about infectious diseases and how to limit their spread.
- Observe and coach healthcare personnel on proper hand hygiene, use of personnel protective equipment, cleaning of hospital rooms and medical instruments, and other practices proven to reduce the spread of infectious organisms.
- Communicate and consult with public health agencies.
- Report communicable diseases to the CDC and other public health agencies.
- Serve as leaders and subject-matter experts in preparing healthcare facilities, personnel, and the public for health threats such as COVID-19.
- Collaborate with regulatory partners to ensure compliance with accreditation agencies

IPs work in a range of care settings:

- Hospitals and health systems
- Nursing homes and other long-term care settings
- Outpatient clinics and surgery centers
- Rehabilitation centers
- Behavioral health units
- Jails and prisons
- Public health agencies

IPs also consult with schools, businesses, and other entities on how to keep the public safe and prevent the spread of infectious diseases.

Infection prevention and control is a multidisciplinary field. IPs come from diverse backgrounds:

- Nursing
- Public health
- Microbiology
- Laboratory studies
- Medical technology
- Information technology
- Allied health professions, e.g., respiratory therapy, medical imaging, radiography

JOB TITLES AND SALARY RANGES

Like in most professions, titles can differ based on facility or role, and can change over time for a variety of reasons. About half of IPs use the straightforward term Infection Preventionist, with some others going by IP (infection prevention) Manager, IP (infection prevention) Director, or System or Corporate IP (infection prevention) Director. A small percentage use the earlier terminology of Infection Control Professional/Practitioner. The move to transition away from the term Infection Control Professional came about in the mid-2000s when APIC and others in the field identified the important role IPs play in *preventing* infections in addition to controlling their spread.

These are some of the most common job titles based on a survey conducted in 2020.

- Infection Preventionist - 50.2%
- IP Manager/IP Director or System/Corporate IP Director - 18.8%
- Infection Control Professional - 4.8%
- Other titles - 26.3%

How much can IPs expect to earn?

As in most fields, pay is determined by a variety of factors. Data from a 2020 survey indicated the following general salaries for IPs. Of course, this will vary by years of expertise, area of responsibility, supervisory role, and region in which an individual works.

- \$50,000 or less - 8%
- \$50,001 to \$80,000 - 37.3%
- \$80,001 to \$110,000 - 40.7%
- \$110,001 to \$140,000 - 9%
- \$140,001 to 170,000 - 3.6%
- \$170,001 to 200,000 - .9%
- \$200,001 or more - .5%

Median salary range of IPs: \$80,001 - \$90,000

LEARN MORE AND JOIN THIS EXCITING AND GROWING FIELD

If you are interested in making an impact on the safety of patients, healthcare workers, and the public, then this may be the career for you!

Here's how to get started:

Academic courses to consider taking:

- Healthcare/Healthcare Epidemiology
- Microbiology
- Infectious Disease Clusters/Outbreaks
- Surveillance
- Quantitative Data Collection, Analysis
- Survey Development
- Monitoring & Evaluation, Program Evaluation
- Implementation Science
- Behavioral Science Health Education: How to Develop Interventions (for specific populations)

Below are some relevant work experiences that you may want to consider:

- **Example A:** Internship, capstone, practicum in a hospital, long-term acute care facility, skilled nursing facility, health department, nonprofit working within the realm of infection prevention
- **Example B:** Research Assistant, Graduate Assistant, Teaching Assistant for a healthcare-associated infections course; working with a professor who researches healthcare-associated infections, infectious diseases
- **Example C:** Capstone, practicum, and/or thesis related to healthcare-associated infections, infection control, infectious diseases
- **Example D:** Volunteer at a hospital, long-term care facility, skilled nursing facility, health department, or within a public health agency or institution
- **Example E:** Fellowship (e.g., Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Public Health Association, National Association of County and City Health Officials, etc.) which allows you exposure to a hospital, long-term acute care facility, skilled nursing facility, health department, nonprofit working within the realm of infection prevention

How to get started (continued):

a-IPC Certification

The a-IPC (Associate – Infection Prevention and Control) entry-level certification is a measure of basic infection prevention knowledge. It is intended for the novice IP and for those interested in pursuing careers in infection prevention and control.

Learn more: <https://www.cbic.org/CBIC/Get-Certified/Get-Started/a-IPC.htm>

APIC Resources

APIC offers education and training for those new to the field and beyond. Here are some resources to get you started.

Visit the APIC website: apic.org/what-is-an-infection-preventionist

- » [APIC Chapter information](#) – Use APIC’s Chapter Map to find a chapter near you. Attend a chapter meeting and get to know the IPs in your area. Many chapters allow students to attend a program for free or for a reduced cost to learn more about the career and make networking connections.
- » [APIC Membership](#) – Once you are surer about your career direction, consider joining APIC where you will find a community of IPs spanning all career stages and gain access to professional development resources. Reduced fees for a *student membership*.
- » [APIC Career Center](#) – View and apply for jobs in the field.

About APIC

Founded in 1972, the Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology (APIC) is the leading association for infection preventionists and epidemiologists. With more than 15,000 members, APIC advances the science and practice of infection prevention and control. APIC carries out its mission through research, advocacy, and patient safety; education, credentialing, and certification; and fostering development of the infection prevention and control workforce of the future. Together with our members and partners, we are working toward a safer world through the prevention of infection. Join us and learn more at apic.org.

APIC Vision:

A Safer World Through the Prevention of Infection

APIC Mission:

To Advance the Science and Practice of Infection Prevention and Control