



Certification Handbook

For Certificants and Candidates



CMSRN® Certification Handbook

All information is subject to change without notice, including test content, fees, and policies.





Last Updated: July 2025



330 N. Wabash Avenue Suite 2000
Chicago, IL 60611
msncb@msncb.org
866-877-2676



TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Why Get Certified	6
	CMSRN Exam	8
	Eligibility Requirements.....	8
	About the Exam.....	10
	Fees	12
	Apply.....	14
	Testing Policies and Procedures.....	17
	Schedule, Reschedule, Extend, or Withdraw.....	18
	Studying for the Exam.....	21
	Results	22
	FailSafe Program	22
	FailSafe for Test-Takers.....	22
	FailSafe for Organizations	23
	Use the CMSRN	24
	Verify the Credential	25
	Appendix A: Domains of Med-Surg Nursing Practice	26
	Appendix B: Exam Development Process	32
	Appendix C: Exam References	35
	Appendix D: Denial, Suspension, or Revocation Policies	36





BEFORE YOU START

About this Handbook

The CMSRN Certification Handbook provides essential information about certification of the Certified Medical-Surgical Registered Nurse (CMSRN) credential from the Medical-Surgical Nursing Certification Board (MSNCB).

We know, there's a lot to get familiar with! We encourage you to read through each section carefully. You are responsible for following all policies and procedures in this handbook. Failure to follow all policies and procedures may result in denial, suspension, or revocation of certification and the forfeiture of your exam or application fees.

MSNCB Policies

Please see MSNCB Certification Policies for a list of policies from MSNCB that are relevant to candidates and CMSRN certificants. Policies covered pertain to ethics, general administration, initial certification, and recertification. These policies are not directly referenced in this handbook, but they were used in the creation of this handbook.

Non-Discrimination Statement

MSNCB shall not discriminate against any certification candidate on the basis of age, sex, race, religion, national origin, ethnicity, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, and gender identity. MSNCB shall not publish materials with discriminatory content, graphics or language that may be offensive to population subgroups.



Earn it.

- ⌘ Meet eligibility criteria
- ⌘ Submit exam application
- ⌘ Pass the exam
- ⌘ Get certified



Use it.

- ⌘ Validate your expertise
- ⌘ Climb the clinical ladder
- ⌘ Continue learning
- ⌘ Volunteer with MSNCB



Keep it.

- ⌘ Meet eligibility criteria
- ⌘ Earn contact hours
- ⌘ Submit application
- ⌘ Get recertified





WHY GET CERTIFIED?

Certification could be the missing piece in your career! Find out what certification is, why you should pursue certification, and why you should earn the CMSRN.



Validate Your Expertise

Certification is the process by which an entity grants formal recognition to individuals that meet predetermined, standardized criteria. The certification process involves determination of eligibility, an assessment of demonstration of competence (a.k.a., passing the certification exam), and requirements for regular recertification ([Institute for Credentialing Excellence](#)).

Certification is valuable

Certification communicates to peers, employers, and patients that you are a competent and qualified medical-surgical nurse. You gain the satisfaction of demonstrating your professional competence, the recognition of your peers, and greater confidence in your own abilities.

Certification also offers a way to differentiate yourself in a professional capacity. It can offer advantages in the marketplace, such as better compensation and career longevity. Many employers also seek certified nurses for their workforce because they are essential to achieving and maintaining American Nursing Credentialing Center (ANCC) Magnet® Recognition.

Certification is good for you

- ⌘ Demonstrate commitment, confidence, and credibility
- ⌘ Validate your expert, specialized knowledge
- ⌘ Maintain an innovative edge in your career
- ⌘ Gain confidence and satisfaction in your professional life
- ⌘ Increase your earning power
- ⌘ Earn respect from patients, colleagues, and employers

Certification is good for your employer

- ⌘ Improved patient care and safety
- ⌘ Attract more qualified nurses
- ⌘ Enjoy higher nurse retention rate





CMSRN Recognition

CMSRN certification validates the professional achievements of the registered nurse who has met identified standards of practice and provides care for medical-surgical patients. A registered nurse who meets the performance level required for competent practice in medical-surgical nursing will receive an acknowledgement of their professional achievements by earning the CMSRN certification.

CMSRN is accredited by ABSNC

The CMSRN exam program has achieved the gold stamp of approval. After meeting rigorous standards, the CMSRN exam was granted accreditation by the Accreditation Board for Specialty Nursing Certification (ABSNC).

Accreditation demonstrates that the CMSRN credential is based on a valid and reliable testing process. The CMSRN exam received its initial accreditation from ABSNC in January 2009 and has maintained accreditation to date.

The ABSNC promotes the highest quality of specialty nursing practice through the establishment of standards of professional specialty nursing certification. ABSNC accreditation is valid for 5 years.

For more information about ABSNC accreditation, visit absnc.org.

CMSRN is accepted for Magnet Recognition Program®

The [Magnet Recognition Program®](#) from the American Nurses' Credentialing Center (ANCC) is recognized worldwide as a program that healthcare organizations join to promote nursing excellence. The CMSRN is a certification that Magnet-recognized and Magnet-applicant organizations may report in the Demographic Data Collection Tool® (DDCT) to become or stay a Magnet® organization.

View the CMSRN on the list of [accepted professional board certifications in the DDCT](#).

CMSRN is endorsed by AMSN

The Academy of Medical-Surgical Nurses (AMSN) is the only national professional nursing specialty organization dedicated to the practice of medical-surgical nursing. The CMSRN is the only medical-surgical certification endorsed by AMSN.





CMSRN EXAM

Congratulations on beginning your certification journey! The cycle starts here, with the certification exam. In this section, you'll learn about eligibility requirements and test development, how to apply, schedule, and sit for the exam, and where to find study materials.



Eligibility Requirements

We have two main eligibility requirements to apply for the CMSRN. You must meet eligibility requirements at the time you apply for the exam and for the full ninety (90)-day test period.

Two requirements to be eligible for the CMSRN

1. **License.** You must hold an unencumbered and current license as a Registered Nurse (RN) in the United States, its territories, or Canada.
 - International nurses can also apply, see [International Testing](#).
2. **Hours of practice.** You must have worked 2,000 practice hours within the past three (3) years in a medical-surgical setting. Practice may be as a clinical nurse, as a manager, or as an educator.
 - It is recommended to have practiced at least two (2) full years in a medical-surgical setting with your RN license.

Med-surg nursing happens everywhere

Don't know if you work in a medical-surgical setting? Review the *Domains of Medical-Surgical Nursing Practice* in [Appendix A](#). The Domains are based on a practice analysis of medical-surgical nursing. If your nursing practice encompasses most of these activities, then you do meet this eligibility requirement.

Still not sure if your practice experience is in a medical-surgical setting? Medical-surgical nursing is defined as the following by MSNCB and AMSN:






Medical-surgical nursing is the single largest nursing specialty in the United States and beyond. Medical-surgical nurses provide care to adults with a variety of medical issues or who are preparing for/recovering from surgery. They have a broad knowledge base and are experts in their practice. Medical-surgical nurses have advanced organizational, prioritization, assessment and communication skills and are leaders in coordinating care among the interprofessional health care team.

Medical-surgical nursing is practiced in several settings across the health care



industry, including hospitals, outpatient settings, in homes, via telemedicine and other non-traditional settings. The specialty of medical-surgical nursing happens in almost every care environment because medical-surgical nursing is what you practice, not where.

Settings that are **not** medical-surgical settings include but are not limited to:

-  Pediatrics
-  Psychiatry
-  Obstetrics and gynecology
-  Operating room
-  Emergency room



International Testing

The CMSRN is available to first-level nurses practicing outside of the United States as well. Our certificants come from several countries around the world, and we would love to have you as part of our med-surg nursing community.

IMPORTANT: The CMSRN certification exam is based on practice in the medical-surgical nursing specialty in the United States. As such, the CMSRN exam is reflective of U.S. practice, regulations, and culture.

International applicants are outside the US and Canada

“International” refers to any location outside the United States, its territories, or Canada. Applicants who have international nursing experience or education **and** are currently practicing internationally **and** do not hold a U.S. RN license must meet international testing eligibility requirements.

International applicants must be verified for equivalency

1. **License.** You must hold a current, full, and unrestricted nursing license,
 - a. Nursing license held and/or nursing education completed internationally must be verified for equivalency by a credentials evaluation organization such as the Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools (CGFNS) or World Education Services (WES) prior to submitting a CMSRN exam application. MSNCB reserves the right to request additional documentation following an agency’s evaluation.
2. **Hours of practice.** You must have worked 2,000 hours of practice within the past three (3) years in a medical surgical setting. Practice may be as a clinical nurse, as a manager, or as an educator.



If you can only meet the requirement for hours of practice by combining international practice with a U.S. RN license held for less than three years, then you must also provide the CGFNS or WES to verify the equivalency of your international education and nursing license.

Locations for international testing

International testing is offered as computer-based testing and the exam is delivered by Pearson VUE. Not all countries have a Pearson VUE testing center, but you can take a remote proctored exam from any location.



About the Exam

The CMSRN certification exam requires:

- ✎ Thorough understanding of the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for competent clinical practice in medical-surgical nursing. The CMSRN exam is based on what a registered nurse (RN) with two (2) years and 2,000 hours of practice in a medical-surgical setting is expected to know.
- ✎ Understanding the test format and all policies and procedures. You will want to be familiar with the format of multiple-choice questions and how to read case studies. You will be expected to follow all exam policies and procedures laid out in this handbook and by the test administrator.

2023 CMSRN Exam Blueprint

The following Domains of Nursing Practice comprise the subject areas on the CMSRN exam as of May 15, 2023. For a complete list of activities associated with each Domain, please see [Appendix A](#).

DOMAINS OF MEDSURG NURSING PRACTICE

1. Patient/Care Management
2. Holistic Patient Care
3. Elements of Interprofessional Care
4. Professional Concepts
5. Nursing Teamwork and Collaboration



150 questions on the exam

The CMSRN exam has 150 multiple choice questions. 125 of the questions are scored, and 25 questions are unscored to gather statistical data on item performance for future test forms. You will not know which questions are scored or unscored.

Three hours to complete the exam

- ⌘ You have three (3) hours to complete the exam. We recommend you arrive at the testing center or launch the remote-proctored exam application thirty (30) minutes before the start of your exam.
- ⌘ There is a help screen with information on how to use the exam application available during the exam. We recommend that you view [Pearson VUE's quick tutorial](#) before test day in preparation for your appointment.
- ⌘ At the end of the exam is an optional exit survey. Your participation in this survey helps us improve the candidate experience.

Passing standard score of 95

A standard score of 95, equal to approximately 71% correct, is required to pass the CMSRN exam. Your raw score is the number of questions you answered correctly out of the 125 scored questions. Your raw score is converted to a standard score to allow for comparison across different exam versions.

Passing score determined by psychometricians and subject matter experts

The passing score for the certification exam is determined by a modified Angoff procedure. The modified Angoff procedure is performed by the Test Development Committee in collaboration with psychometric consultants from our test administrator using a criterion-referenced methodology. The criterion is what a minimally competent nurse needs to know.

Get exam results immediately

You will find out if you passed or failed the exam immediately after completing the exam. Your score report will be available for download in your Pearson VUE profile within 24 hours of completing the exam.

Exam developed with the Data Recognition Corporation

MSNCB collaborates with our test development partner, Data Recognition Corporation (DRC), to develop the CMSRN exam.

The CMSRN exam is based on a job task analysis (JTA), conducted at least every five years. A JTA is necessary to validate the tasks medical-surgical registered nurses perform and the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to perform these tasks competently to provide safe patient care.



MSNCB has several committees that conduct test development work. These committees are composed of volunteers who are CMSRN-certified medical-surgical nurses who hold the CMSRN credential and are considered subject matter experts (SMEs) in the practice. Our SMEs work alongside our test development partner to create the JTA survey, review the results of the survey, make recommended changes to the content of the exam, write exam questions, review the exam questions, review item statistics, and set the passing score. For full details about how the CMSRN exam is developed, see [Appendix B](#).

Maintain your records

MSNCB will retain electronic records of all candidates for at least five (5) years. It is your professional responsibility to notify MSNCB of any change in name, mailing address, phone number, and email address before testing.

Confidentiality

All application information is confidential and is not shared with any agency other than MSNCB and our test administrator.

The test materials are confidential and will not be released to any person or agency.

Results of your exam attempt may only be released to third parties with your written consent. Participants in the FailSafe Program grant the right to their employer to know the outcome of their exam attempts.

See [MSNCB Certification Policies](#) for more information about confidentiality.



Fees

Exam application fees are due at the time you submit your application. Applying for a [CMSRN Certification Grant](#) can help cover the costs of the exam. You might also encourage your facility to participate in the [FailSafe Program](#), or just ask them to pay for your exam!

Exam application fees

AMSN members receive a discount on the exam application fees. You must be a member of AMSN at the time you apply to receive the AMSN member exam fee.

	AMSN Member Fee	Standard Fee
Initial Exam	\$267	\$394



First-time Retake Exam	\$189	\$315
-------------------------------	-------	-------

- 🔗 First-time retake discount is only active for one year following your first exam.
- 🔗 All exam fees include a non-refundable processing fee of \$90.
- 🔗 Fees are subject to change without notice.

Certification Grant

The [CMSRN Certification Grant](#) covers the full fee of the exam application. You must have been a member of AMSN for at least one year to be eligible. Grant applications are open all year.

FailSafe Program

The FailSafe Program allows CMSRN-eligible nurses at participating facilities the opportunity to apply for the CMSRN exam twice within a twelve (12) month period, for the cost of one attempt. See [FailSafe Program](#) to learn how your employer can partner with MSNCB to pay for your exam.



Apply

We've provided the link below directly to the CMSRN exam application because we know you're probably ready to get started. Applications may be submitted at any time. Keep reading for information on applying for the exam, requesting testing accommodations, and completing an exam application audit.

[Apply for the CMSRN Exam](#)

Four things to have with you when you apply

1. The last 4 digits of your Social Security number
 - a. Enter 0000 if you do not have a United States Social Security number.
2. Your RN license number, original license issue date, current license expiration date, and the state, territory, or province you are licensed to practice in.
3. A government-issued photo ID with a signature and expiration date.
 - a. The name on your ID must match the name on your exam application.
 - b. Your ID must be unexpired on the day of your exam appointment.
4. Credit card information or a voucher code from your FailSafe facility.

Complete the application in less than ten steps!

To submit an application, you'll need to create an account in [MSNCB's Certification Portal](#), enter your RN license details, enter your medical-surgical work experience over the last three years, indicate whether you require testing accommodations, and pay exam fees.



For detailed instructions with visual aids, please refer to the [Certification Application User Guide](#).

Take the exam when you get your Authorization to Test

You will receive your **Authorization to Test (ATT)** in a second email when you are approved to schedule. **You have ninety (90) days to take the exam from the time you receive your ATT.**

Please contact us if you do not receive your Authorization to Test and you have not been contacted by MSNCB within five (5) days of submitting your application.

Denial of Certification

There are circumstances in which your application for the CMSRN certification may be denied. See [Appendix D](#) or [MSNCB Certification Policies](#) for more information.



ADA Testing Accommodations

MSNCB and our test administrator will provide reasonable and appropriate testing accommodations in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) for individuals with documented disabilities.

The ADA ensures that individuals with disabilities have the opportunity to fairly pursue professional opportunities by requiring organizations to offer the certification exam in an accessible manner. MSNCB is committed to allowing all test-takers the ability to demonstrate their true aptitude on the exam without their functional limitations affecting their performance in ways not related to the exam.

Testing accommodations for people with disabilities

Testing accommodations are changes to the regular testing environment and auxiliary aids and services that allow individuals with disabilities to demonstrate their true aptitude or achievement level on standardized exams.

Accommodations for individuals taking the exam via remote proctoring (taking the exam at home or outside of a testing center) are the same for individuals taking the exam at test centers. If a unique request is made, MSNCB will seek prior approval from the testing agency.

Devices that have external communication capability such as cellular, wireless, or Bluetooth must be pre-authorized by MSNCB and our test administrator before you schedule your exam, or you may not be allowed to test on your test day.

Examples of testing accommodations include but are not limited to:

- Hearing aid/cochlear implant
- Mobility aids
- Screen reading technology



- ⌘ Reasonable extension of testing time
- ⌘ Distraction-free rooms
- ⌘ Permission to bring and take medications
- ⌘ Personal reader provided by test administrator
- ⌘ Interpreter provided by test administrator

Qualifications for testing accommodations

Under the ADA, an individual with a disability is a) a person who has a physical or mental impairment that b) substantially limits a major life activity (e.g., seeing, hearing, learning, reading, concentrating, or thinking) or a major bodily function (e.g., the neurological, endocrine, or digestive system) as c) compared to the general population.

Anxiety solely in the testing context is not a disability under the ADA. However, impairments recognized by the ADA may include ADHD, generalized anxiety disorder, or a specific learning disability that warrant approval of testing accommodations.

Requests for testing accommodations based upon a temporary impairment (i.e., a broken leg) will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

Request testing accommodations when applying

1. **Request.** As you complete your application, you will be able to indicate that you require ADA Accommodations for the exam.
2. **Form.** Download the [Exam Accommodations Request Form](#) provided on the ADA Accommodations tab. It is to be filled out with a licensed physician, psychiatrist, or clinical psychologist and uploaded at the time of your request. The professional evaluation must be a) less than three years old and b) made by a licensed individual who is qualified to diagnose the specific illness or disability.
 - a. Candidates who select the option for testing accommodations but do not respond to our requests for further information within thirty (30) days will not be allowed to take the exam. Your application will be denied, and you will be refunded the exam application fee minus the administrative processing fee.
3. **Decision.** The test administration vendor will approve/deny your test accommodations request within fifteen (15) days.
 - a. All reasonable attempts will be made by MSNCB to accommodate the needs of individuals with disabilities. The content and validity of the exam may not be compromised by these accommodations. If we are unable to accommodate your request, you will be refunded the exam application fees minus the administrative processing fee.
4. **Schedule.** For some test accommodations, you may be required to call the test administrator to schedule your exam. In these instances, MSNCB will provide you with the number to call after your accommodations have been approved.

The Test Accommodation Request Form and any subsequent documents will not be disclosed to the testing administrator or any other individuals, including employers



and supervisors of the test candidate. Exam results will not indicate the use of testing accommodations.



Audit of Exam Application

You will attest to submitting correct information during the application process. All RN licenses are verified by NURSYS. If MSNCB has any reason to believe you have not met eligibility requirements, your application may be flagged for audit.

MSNCB staff will audit 5% of randomly selected applications for initial certification to verify requirements are met. The audit includes verification of the RN license and employer verification of 2,000 hours of nursing practice within the past 3 years in a medical-surgical setting.

What to know if your exam application is selected for audit

1. **Notification.** You will be notified in writing by MSNCB within five (5) business days of submitting your initial certification application if you are selected for an audit.
2. **Verification.** The supervisor(s) listed in your work experience entry will be contacted to attest to the following:
 - a. You are an RN with a current and unencumbered license,
 - b. You have accrued 2,000 hours in medical-surgical practice within the last three (3) years as an RN.
3. **Inquiry.** If needed, requests for information will be sent to the applicant's primary email address. Please consistently check for communication from MSNCB, including in your junk and spam folders, until the audit process is complete.
 - a. It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that all inquiries are responded to in a timely manner. Failure to respond to information requests within thirty (30) days will result in your application being denied.
4. **Results.** You will receive an email with the results of your audit within ten (10) days of your application submission
 - a. If any information in the application is found to be false, or inquiries unaddressed, the applicant will be unable to continue in the certification process. No refund will be provided.
 - b. If you successfully pass the audit, you will be able to continue with the certification process and receive your Authorization to Test.





Testing Policies and Procedures

The CMSRN exam is offered year-round, excluding holidays, at [Pearson VUE testing centers](#) and via [OnVUE remote proctoring](#).

Please fully read the following policies and procedures for taking the test at either a test center or via OnVUE **before** scheduling your exam. You will **not** be provided a refund of your exam application fee if you miss or are removed from an exam appointment due to failure to follow these policies and procedures.



Identification and Name

The identification and name requirements apply to exams taken at testing centers **and** via OnVUE.

Identification to bring with you to the exam

You must present a [government-issued photo ID](#) with a signature and expiration date on the day of your exam appointment. Your ID must be unexpired, or accompanied by renewal paperwork.

Whether or not you are a citizen of the country you are testing in, any of the following can be your primary form of ID:

- Driver's license
- Military ID card
- Passport
- National identification card
- Alien registration card (green card/permanent resident/visa)

Name on ID must match name on exam application

Your ID name must match your exam application name. Only MSNCB can change the name in your exam application after you submit it. You must contact us two (2) weeks in advance of your exam appointment with supporting documentation for the name change.



Testing Centers

The CMSRN exam is delivered by computer at Pearson VUE testing centers widely available across the United States and around the world. Most metropolitan areas have



at least one testing center that offers the exam three to four days per week and one to two times per day. You can search for test center locations before you apply for the exam on [Pearson VUE's website](#).

Take time to review the [Candidate Rules Agreement](#) to understand all day-of-testing requirements.

You will be contacted if your test site is closed

Occasionally, a testing site may need to temporarily close for various reasons including unforeseen events, such as extreme weather, natural disaster, power outages, technical issues, pandemic impacts, or other circumstances.

You will be directly informed of the closure and asked to reschedule your exam appointment if your test center closes and your appointment is canceled.



OnVUE Remote Proctoring

OnVUE remote proctoring allows you to launch the exam online via computer at a secure location of your choice. Proctors are there for you in real-time to assist with any problems you may encounter and to maintain the security and integrity of the exam.

Please review the [OnVUE tutorials and resources](#) on Pearson VUE's website for the most up to date information about remote proctored exams, including system requirements, environmental requirements, and check-in procedures.



Schedule, Reschedule, Extend, or Withdraw

IMPORTANT: You have ninety (90) days to take the exam from the time you receive your Authorization to Test. Don't wait too long to schedule—we recommend you check for appointment availability at least two weeks before your desired exam date.



Schedule Exam



You can choose your test center location, test date, and time through the Pearson VUE candidate portal. This will become accessible after you receive your ATT, through the “Manage Exam” button on your application.

Schedule your exam

You can schedule an exam up to three (3) days before your desired exam date.

1. **Schedule.** In the portal, click on the exam name in the “Schedule an exam” box.
 - a. **Select your exam modality.** You’ll have two option for taking your exam: at a test center or online at my home or office via OnVUE. You can click each option to learn more before confirming.
 - i. **If testing in a center-** You’ll be prompted to find a test center. You can select up to three centers to compare availability.
 - b. **Find an appointment.** Only dates with appointment availability can be selected as you view the appointment calendar. If no appointments are available on your desired test day, you may find another test center or opt for OnVUE testing.
2. **Confirmation.** After you book the appointment, you will see a review screen. Click “Submit Order” to confirm your appointment details. When you see the “You are booked!” screen, you have scheduled your exam. Pearson VUE will email you an exam confirmation after you schedule your exam.
 - a. **If testing via OnVUE-** You’ll be prompted to run a system test to verify that the computer and internet connection you plan to use on exam day meet the requirements for online testing. You’ll be able to run the system test any time by clicking on the exam appointment from the main screen.
 - b. **If testing with accommodations-** Ensure that your accommodation details are included on the Exam Appointment Details screen. If not, please contact Pearson VUE for assistance at 800-274-8979.

One exam for one exam registration

You may only test once during your test period. Your test period ends after your exam appointment whether or not you took the exam, unless you are granted an eligibility extension. See Missed Exams and Expired Test Periods for more information.



Reschedule or Cancel Exam

Reschedule your exam

You can reschedule an exam up to two (2) days before your already scheduled in-center exam appointment. If you are within two (2) days of your appointment, request an eligibility extension in your exam application.

For OnVUE test appointments, you can reschedule up until the exam time.



In the Pearson VUE candidate portal, click on your upcoming appointment to view the Exam Appointment Details. You can reschedule or cancel your exam, either option will allow you to create another appointment.

If you would like to change your appointment time or location, reschedule your exam. If you would like to change your test modality, cancel your current appointment.

Review the new appointment details and **confirm reschedule**.

Cancel your exam

You cannot cancel your exam if it is scheduled in the next 48 hours. Request an extension instead or forfeit your exam fees.

In the Pearson VUE candidate portal, click on your upcoming appointment to view the Exam Appointment Details. If you cancel your exam, you will still be able to create another appointment.

Agree to the cancellation policy and **confirm cancellation**.

Cancelling your exam application will **not** automatically result in a refund of your exam application fees. See [Withdraw CMSRN Application](#) for refunds and withdrawals.



Missed Exams and Expired Test Periods

We understand life happens, and sometimes you can't make a scheduled exam appointment or you forget to schedule an exam. In those cases, you can request an extension of your 90-day test period.

Request an extension for two reasons

- 🔗 You miss a scheduled exam.
- 🔗 Your 90-day test period will expire before you can schedule an exam.

Request within 10 days of a missed exam or expired test period

You must request an extension within ten (10) days of a missed exam or the expiration of your test period. Your exam application fee will **not** be refunded, and you will have to reapply for the exam and pay full fees again if you miss this 10-day deadline.

Go to Manage Exam within your exam application to request an extension.

Cost of extension is \$90

The cost for an extension is \$90 and is non-refundable. You will only be charged if your extension is approved.

If you miss an exam or are unable to schedule through no fault of your own, you may request a no-fee extension. Supporting documentation may be required.



One extension for one exam registration

You may only have one extension for each exam registration.



Withdraw CMSRN Application

You **cannot** withdraw your CMSRN application if you have an exam scheduled.

Cancel any scheduled exam before you request to withdraw your CMSRN application. Then, contact us to request a refund. All exam fees include a non-refundable \$90 processing fee, no exceptions. If you are within 48 hours of your in-center appointment, you will not be able to cancel your exam and your fees may be forfeited.

We review refund requests on a case-by-case basis. Supporting documentation must be provided.



Studying for the Exam

It's time to prep for the CMSRN exam! We publish the current [exam blueprint](#) and [exam reference list](#) on our website to guide your study. The Academy of Medical-Surgical Nurses provides [additional materials](#) to help you prep for the CMSRN.

IMPORTANT: These resources do not include current examination questions and are not a requirement to sit for the CMSRN certification examination. These resources are not the only or preferred route to adequate preparation. Using these study resources does not imply advantage or successful performance on the examination.

Appendix A outlines the CMSRN exam blueprint. For a complete list of references used in the development of the CMSRN exam, please see Appendix C.





Results

You will find out if you passed or failed the exam immediately after completing the exam.

Score Report

If you take your exam at a test center, you will receive a printed score report. The score report will include a pass/fail result. For both test center and OnVUE exams, detailed information about your test results will be provided in an online score report accessible from the Pearson VUE candidate portal within 24 hours.

Retake the exam

If you did not pass the exam, you will be able to apply for another exam as soon as we receive your score and contact you to reapply. You will receive a discount on your reapplication within one year of your first attempt if this is your first time retaking the exam.

I'm certified, now what?

Congratulations! Now that you're CMSRN certified, read up on how to [verify your credential](#), and maintain your credential. It's never too early to come up with a plan for recertification!



FAILSAFE PROGRAM

The FailSafe Program allows CMSRN-eligible nurses at participating facilities to apply for the CMSRN exam twice within a twelve (12) month period, while only paying for the first attempt.



FailSafe for Test-Takers

Medical-surgical nurses who meet the CMSRN eligibility requirements and are employees of an organization with active FailSafe vouchers may participate in the program. Individuals or independent groups of nurses are not eligible to apply through the FailSafe Program.



Apply your voucher to your exam application

Once your organization receives their vouchers, your FailSafe Coordinator will share with you your individual voucher number. Follow this [FailSafe For Nurses Guide](#) for detailed instructions and visual aids on how to apply your voucher code to your exam application.

Need to extend your test period?

If you miss your exam or let your 90-day test period expire without taking the exam, then you forfeit your voucher. You must contact us at least 10 days prior to the exam or end of the test period to request an extension, which you will need to pay for yourself.

Employer provided results of exam attempt

You grant the right to your employer to know the outcome of your exam attempts by participating in the FailSafe Program.



FailSafe for Organizations

The FailSafe Program can help set your nurses up for success, with a safety net! For detailed instructions and visual aids on how to set up an organization account and distribute vouchers, refer to the [FailSafe Administrator User Guide](#).

3, 5, or 10 vouchers

Your organization can purchase vouchers at three tiers: 3, 5, or 10 nurses can use these vouchers to apply for the CMSRN exam within your contract year. If your organization is unable to assign all vouchers within the year, then you can roll over unused vouchers with an additional purchase of vouchers for the next year. You can make unlimited voucher purchases within the same year.

Voucher Tier	Cost
3	\$1,182
5	\$1,970
10	\$3,940

 Each voucher represents the cost of one test

 **Second attempts are at no cost**

Reassign vouchers in the event of a missed exam or expired test period

If a nurse misses their exam or does not schedule within their test period, then they forfeit their assigned voucher. However, we can grant a nurse an extension or you can reassign their voucher to someone else in accordance with our policies on [missed exams or expired test periods](#).



Are there any other perks?

Yes! FailSafe organizations receive a tiered discount on AMSN's live or virtual [Certification Review Course](#) based on their voucher level.

Voucher Tier	CRC Discount
3	5%
5	10%
10	15%



USE THE CMSRN

Congratulations on earning the CMSRN credential! Learn how to maximize your credential below.

Your credential is active for five years

Your initial certification period begins on the first day of the month in which you pass the certification exam and is active for five (5) years. For example, if you passed the exam on August 15, 2025, then your certification period would be active from August 1, 2025 through July 31, 2030.

When you recertify, any subsequent certification period is also active for five (5) years.

Display your credential proudly

The CMSRN mark is federally registered with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. Nurses certified for the CMSRN by MSNCB may use the following in all correspondence or professional relations:

CMSRN® - Certified Medical-Surgical Registered Nurse.

- 🔗 Request a CMSRN lapel pin
- 🔗 Print and display your certificate in your unit or office
- 🔗 Include your credential when you sign your name in a professional capacity
- 🔗 Print your credential on your business card, resume, and other professional materials

Suspension or revocation of certification

There are circumstances in which your CMSRN certification may be suspended or revoked. Please see [Appendix D](#) or [MSNCB Certification Policies](#) for more information.



Plan for recertification

You'll want to decide on a recertification method early in your certification period. Refer to the CMSRN Recertification Handbook for more information. Visit msncb.org/CMSRN/Recertification.



Verify the Credential

As a CMSRN, you'll want proof of your accomplishment. Current and potential employers will also want to verify certifications.



Digital Badges

Digital badges are credible and quick

A digital badge is an online representation of your CMSRN certification. It is a credible source and a quick method of verifying your certification. Digital badges can be shared through social media, and they can be added to your email signature. They inform your peers and employers of the knowledge, skills, and competencies you have within your professional practice.

Verify your credential with a digital badge

You will receive an email about claiming your digital badge 1-2 weeks after you certify. Share your digital badge with current or potential employers as proof of your certification.



Verification

Independent verification available with your consent

Current or potential employers, among other third parties, may request independent verification of your certification. We will only provide your certification status to third parties with your written consent. If you are enrolled in the FailSafe Program, you grant the right to your employer to know the outcome of your exam attempts.

We provide proof of certification on MSNCB letterhead by request. To request certification verification, contact us at certification@msncb.org.



Appendix A: Domains of Med-Surg Nursing Practice

2023 CMSRN Exam Blueprint

The following table identifies the percentage and number of questions from each domain that will appear on the CMSRN exam as of May 15, 2023.

Domain	Percentage Weight	Number of Items on Test
Patient/Care Management	32%	40
Holistic Patient Care	15%	19
Elements of Interprofessional Care	17%	21
Professional Concepts	15%	19
Nursing Teamwork and Collaboration	21%	26
Total	100%	125



Domain	Percentage Weight	Number of Items on Test
Patient/Care Management	32%	40 Items
Patient Safety	1. Nursing process - assessment, diagnosis, planning, implementation, evaluation	
	2. Patient safety protocols (e.g., skin, falls, restraints, rounding, suicide)	
	3. Risk factors (e.g., pharmacological, environment, equipment, demographics)	
	4. Patient safety culture (e.g., near miss reporting, "just culture", "speak up", high accountable organizations)	
	5. Care bundles (e.g., checklist, algorithms)	
	6. Patient safety assessments and reporting (e.g., abuse, human trafficking, social determinants)	
	7. Risk assessment methods (e.g., Root Cause Analysis [RCA], Failure Mode and Effects Analysis [FMEA], safety rounds, safety huddles)	
Infection Prevention	1. Universal and transmission-based precautions	
	2. Infection control practices and standards	
	3. Current evidence-based practice for infection control and prevention procedures	
	4. Antimicrobial stewardship (e.g., surgical scrub, antibiotics, probiotics)	
Medication Management	1. Safe medication administration practices (e.g., interaction, adverse reaction, intravenous therapy)	
	2. Patient medication education	
	3. Polypharmacy	
	4. Safe drug management and disposal (e.g., stewardship, home medication management)	
	5. Advanced access devices (i.e., ports, central lines, epidurals)	
	6. Financial implications to patients	
Pain Management	1. Chronic and/or acute pain management (e.g., pharmacological, non-pharmacological, multimodal)	
	2. Patient pain management expectations	
	3. Patient advocacy	
Non-Pharmacological Interventions	1. Non-pharmacological interventions (e.g., repositioning, heat or cold)	
	2. Complementary and alternative therapies (e.g., acupuncture, aromatherapy)	
Surgical/Procedural Nursing Management	1. Pre- and post-procedural unit standards (e.g., consent, timeout, frequent monitoring)	
	2. Pertinent potential complications and management	
	3. Scope of practice related to procedures (e.g., moderate/procedural sedation)	
	4. Supplies, instruments, and equipment	
Nutrition	1. Individualized nutritional needs (e.g., malnutrition, disease processes, complications, cultural)	
	2. Nutrition administration modalities (e.g., enteral, parenteral)	
	3. Resources for alternate nutrition administration (e.g., speech consultation, dietary consultation)	
	4. Indications for alternate nutrition administration	



Domain		Percentage Weight	Number of Items on Test
Holistic Patient Care		15%	19 Items
Patient-Centered Care	1.	Patient-centered care (e.g., active listening, communication preferences, family involvement, health goals).	
	2.	Resources for patient-centered care	
	3.	Patient advocacy	
	4.	Patient satisfaction management (e.g., grievances, concerns regarding practices, second opinion, service recovery)	
Diversity and Inclusion	1.	Cultural and linguistic needs (e.g., sign, oral, and written languages)	
	2.	Cultural and linguistic resources (e.g., translated materials, interpreter services)	
	3.	Implicit bias	
Education of Patients and Families	1.	Health maintenance and disease prevention	
	2.	Health literacy	
	3.	Teaching methods	
Health Promotion	1.	Health promotion goals	
	2.	Resources available for patient/family	
	3.	Health information to meet patient needs	
Palliative/End-of-Life Care	1.	Palliative or end-of-life patient/caregiver resources (e.g., hospice, spiritual, cultural, physical)	
	2.	End-of-life preferences (e.g., advance directives, code status)	
	3.	Post-mortem care	
	4.	Organ donation process	
	5.	Regulatory requirements for reporting death (e.g., coroner's case)	



Domain	Percentage Weight	Number of Items on Test
Elements of Interprofessional Care	17%	21 Items
Nursing Process/Clinical Judgement Measurement Model	1. Nursing process - assessment, diagnosis, planning, implementation, evaluation	
	2. Strategies to individualize care	
Interprofessional Collaboration	1. Role within the interdisciplinary team (e.g., teamwork, communication skills)	
	2. Interprofessional rounding	
	3. Care coordination	
	4. Collaborative problem solving	
Care Coordination and Transition Management	1. Community resources	
	2. Interdisciplinary collaboration integration methods (e.g., discharge planning, mobility, physical therapy)	
	3. Health history assessment from multiple sources	
	4. Discharge procedures (e.g., medication reconciliation)	
	5. Patient/family centered care	
	6. Care coordination and transition	
	7. Interprofessional roles and responsibilities	
	8. Continuum of care	
	9. Patients at risk for readmissions	
	10. Social determinants of health	
	11. Quality patient outcome measures	
Documentation	1. Documentation of patient care	
	2. Electronic health records	
	3. Downtime procedures	
	4. Coaching for documentation performance improvement	
Technology	1. Technology, equipment use, and troubleshooting	
	2. Technology trends in health care	
	3. Nursing informatics	



Domain	Percentage Weight	Number of Items on Test
Professional Concepts	15%	19 Items
Communication	1. Chain of command	
	2. Communication skills (e.g., active listening, verbal, non-verbal, written, conflict resolution, mediation)	
	3. Information sharing (e.g., Situation, Background, Assessment, Recommendation [SBAR], hand-off, closed-loop, check-back, read-back, huddle, verbal orders, bedside report, interdisciplinary)	
	4. Communication barriers (e.g., need for interpreter/translator, physical and cognitive limitations)	
	5. De-escalation techniques (e.g., verbal intervention, calm communication)	
Critical Thinking	1. Time management and prioritization of care	
	2. Crisis situations and resources (e.g., rapid response team, deteriorating patients, early warning systems)	
	3. Crisis management	
	4. Critical thinking (e.g., self-regulation, problem solving, analysis, interpretation, inference)	
Healthy Practice Environment	1. Workplace safety (e.g., physical, emotional, environmental)	
	2. Nurse resiliency and well-being	
	3. Unintended consequences (e.g., moral distress, moral injury, compassion fatigue, burnout)	
	4. Resource allocation (e.g., staffing, equipment)	
	5. Peer accountability	
Scope of Practice and Ethics	1. Scope of practice and code of ethics for nurses per local and regional nursing bodies (e.g., Code of Ethics for Nurses with Interpretive Statements, Standard V of the AMSN Scope and Standards, local governing Scope of Practice)	
	2. Patients' rights and responsibilities	
	3. Professional reporting and resources (e.g., ethics, scope of practice, unsafe practice)	
	4. Policies, procedures, regulatory and licensure requirements, standards of practice, and applicable state, federal, and local laws	
Quality Management	1. Evidence-based guidelines for nursing sensitive indicators	
	2. Quality standards and policies	
	3. Continuous quality and process improvement	
	4. Nursing professional practice model	
	5. Adverse event reporting	
	6. Patient customer experience based on data results (e.g., surveys, value-based purchasing)	
	7. Service recovery	
	8. Project development	
Evidence-Based Practice and Research	1. Legislative and licensure requirements	
	2. Evidence-based practice principles	
	3. Research process	



Domain		Percentage Weight	Number of Items on Test
Nursing Teamwork and Collaboration		21%	26 Items
Delegation and Supervision	1.	Delegation and/or supervision practices	
	2.	Scope of practice (e.g., licensed and unlicensed team members)	
	3.	Prioritization skills (e.g., disease process)	
	4.	Budgetary considerations (e.g., supplies, staffing, fiscal efficiency)	
Career Development Relationships	1.	Professional engagement	
	2.	Mentoring and coaching resources	
	3.	Reflective practice	
	4.	Roles and responsibilities	
	5.	Coaching and learning theories	
	6.	Professional empowerment	
	7.	Orientation planning and preceptor best practices	
	8.	Career development resources (e.g., education, training)	
Professional Development	1.	Professional nursing practice and individual competencies	
	2.	Professional behaviors (e.g., network, participate in professional organization)	
	3.	Clinical judgement	
	4.	Peer review methods	
	5.	Educational needs assessment	
Leadership	1.	Regulatory and compliance standards	
	2.	Organizational structure	
	3.	Shared decision-making	
	4.	Nursing philosophy	
	5.	Leadership models	
	6.	Nursing care delivery systems	
	7.	Change management (e.g., Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, Reinforcement [ADKAR])	
	8.	Recruitment and retention	
	9.	Employee engagement	
	10.	Staff advocacy	
	11.	Conflict management	
	12.	Financial stewardship	
Disaster Planning and Management	1.	Emergency procedures	
	2.	Hospital incident command structure	



Appendix B: Exam Development Process

The Medical-Surgical Nursing Certification Board (MSNCB) participates in and provides oversight for the development and ongoing maintenance of the Certified Medical-Surgical Registered Nurse (CMSRN) exam. We work in partnership with our test development partner, Prometric, to ensure the exam is developed and maintained in a manner consistent with generally accepted psychometric, education testing, and national accreditation standards for certification programs.

Eight Steps to Exam Development

1. Create the Test Development Committee

The Test Development Committee is responsible for the development of the certification exams. Additional panels of subject matter experts may be appointed to conduct exam development activities. Nurses holding a CMSRN certification may apply to be on the Test Development Committee.

2. Conduct a Job Task Analysis

Job Analysis Studies are conducted to identify and validate the knowledge and skills which are measured by the exam. The results of the Job Analysis will serve as the basis for the exam.

MSNCB has determined that a Job Analysis will be conducted every five (5) years or more frequently as needed. This determination is based on the frequency of substantive changes in the field and compliance with standards for professional certification programs.

3. Determine Exam Specifications

The content for the exam is determined based on the recommended content outline and content area weights developed following each Job Analysis. The final content outline and corresponding content weights are approved by the MSNCB Board of Directors.

4. Write and Review Items

The questions and answers on the exam are referred to as “items.” Item writing and reviewing are usually conducted annually. Item writers and reviewers are required to complete item development training delivered by our test development partner prior to writing and reviewing exam items.

The development of all items is directly linked to the approved content outline.

Once items have been written by trained subject matter experts, they are reviewed for accuracy and to avoid bias. Once an item has satisfactorily completed this initial review it will be added to the item bank. Newly written items will be pretested as unscored items before being included as scored items on a test form.



5. Maintain an Item Bank

An item bank includes all items developed for the exam. The test development partner oversees the maintenance and security of the item bank. Each item in the item bank is reviewed at least every three (3) years for quality control.

6. Assemble and Approve Exam Form

MSNCB is responsible for exam content and assembly of the exam forms.

New exam forms are typically launched on an annual basis. Any exam form in use for more than two (2) testing windows undergoes an obsolescence review facilitated by the psychometric consultant with a subject matter expert committee to ensure continued item accuracy and relevance. Decisions regarding the number of exam forms and the frequency for replacing the exam forms are made each year by the MSNCB Board in consultation with the psychometric consultant.

Draft exam forms are assembled by the psychometric consultant to meet the exam specifications and are reviewed and approved by the Test Development Committee. The draft forms meet the requirements of the test specifications with respect to content and weighting and are reviewed for bias and sensitivity. Each exam form includes unscored questions to be pre-tested.

7. Establish the Passing Point

The passing point for the exam is established using a criterion-reference technique. Qualified and trained subject matter experts working with the psychometric consultant determine the passing point.

The process used to determine the passing point is documented as part of a cut score study report. The final passing point resulting from this process is approved by the MSNCB Board of Directors. Any modifications to the recommended passing point are documented in the final passing point study report along with the rationale for those changes.

Specific methodologies for establishing the passing score for exams and ensuring exam forms are equivalent are selected and documented by the psychometric consultant based on compliance with national accreditation standards.

A standard setting study is conducted following completion of each Job Analysis Study, at a minimum, but the study can be conducted more frequently to support programmatic requirements. Forms developed between job analysis studies will be equated to the base form.

8. Analyze the Exam Results

Performance statistics are calculated and retained for each exam item and each exam form. A statistical analysis is performed by the psychometric consultant following each administration of the exam.



At least annually, a test analysis or technical report is produced by the psychometric consultant and reviewed by MSNCB to evaluate the reliability and effectiveness of the exam and to determine any areas that must be reviewed or revised.

At a minimum, the technical reports include a summary of the exam administration, the number of exam takers, the passing point and number of exam items, measures of average performance, measures of performance variability, reliability indices, pass-fail percentages, and recommendations from the psychometric consultant. The psychometric analyzes performance across all exam administration modalities to ensure comparability and identify potential irregularities.



Appendix C: Exam References

A minimum of two references must be cited for each item on the CMSRN examination to verify its correctness. It is preferred that the most recent edition of the *AMSN Core Curriculum for Medical-Surgical Nursing* be cited as a reference whenever possible. Another reference is the current *Scope and Standards of Medical-Surgical Nursing Practice* from AMSN.

Other reference texts include:

- Bauldoff, G., Carno, M., Gubrud, P. (2019). *Lemone & Burke's Medical-surgical nursing: Critical reasoning in patient care* (7th ed.). Pearson/Prentice Hall.
- Cheever, K.H., Hinkle, J.L., Overbaugh, K. (2021). *Brunner & Suddarth's textbook of medical-surgical nursing* (15th ed.). Wolters Kluwer.
- DiMaggio, K., McCuiston, L.E., Winston, M.B., Yeager, J.J. (2022). *Pharmacology: A patient-centered nursing process approach* (11th ed.). W.B. Saunders.
- Giger, J.N., Powell-Young, Y.M. (2024). *Transcultural nursing: Assessment & intervention* (9th ed.). Elsevier.
- Hagler, D., Harding, M.M., Kwong, J., Reinisch, C. (2022) *Lewis's Medical Surgical Nursing: assessment & management of clinical problems* (12th ed.). Elsevier.
- Hall, A.M., Perry, A.G., Potter, P.A., Stockert, P.A., (2022). *Fundamentals of nursing* (11th ed.). Mosby.
- Ignatavicius, D.D., Rebar, C.R., & Heimgartner, N.M. (2023). *Medical-surgical nursing: Concepts for clinical judgement collaborative care* (11th ed.). Elsevier.
- Murray, E. (2021). *Nursing Leadership & Management for Patient Safety & Quality Care* (2nd ed.). F.A. Davis.
- Norris, T.L. (2024). *Porth's pathophysiology: Concepts of altered health states* (11th ed.). Wolters Kluwer Health.
- Skidmore-Roth, L. (2023). *Mosby's 2024 nursing drug reference* (37th ed.). Mosby.
- Sportsman, S., Yoder-Wise, P.S. (2022). *Leading & Managing in Nursing* (8th ed.). Mosby.

In addition, a few authoritative, commonly used sources, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website may be used.



Appendix D: Denial, Suspension, or Revocation Policies

The following sections summarize Policies 209, 210, and 211. See CMSRN Certification Policies for a more in-depth review.

Ethics Committee responds to misconduct

The Ethics Committee maintains and enforces standards of professional conduct and ethics within MSNCB and for CMSRN certificants. Any violation of certification policies should be reported to MSNCB in writing and should include a detailed description of factual allegations supporting the charges and any relevant supporting documentation.

Revocation, denial, or suspension of credential

We consider misrepresentation or noncompliance with certification policies or misuse of the CMSRN credential serious issues that require investigation and possible disciplinary or legal action. If certification is denied, suspended, or revoked for any reason, no fee will be refunded.

MSNCB may revoke, deny, or suspend certification for causes including but not limited to:

- ✎ Falsifying information on the exam or recertification application
- ✎ Falsifying any supporting documentation requested by MSNCB
- ✎ Suspected pre-knowledge of test content
- ✎ Impersonating another person to take the exam
- ✎ Cheating on the exam or any other evidence of compromising the exam
- ✎ Sharing exam knowledge with others
- ✎ Misrepresentation or fraudulent use of the CMSRN credential
- ✎ Using the CMSRN credential after your credential has expired

Appeal MSNCB decisions

If you are denied certification or your credential is revoked or suspended, you may appeal the decision in certain circumstances. All eligible appeals must be filed within thirty (30) days of notification of denial, revocation, or suspension or the right to appeal is forfeit.

The appeal is reviewed and decided by a sub-committee of the MSNCB Board of Directors who were not involved with the previous recommended decision by the Ethics Committee.

Eligible for appeals

- ✎ Denial of eligibility for the certification exam.
- ✎ Denial of eligibility for recertification by contact hours.
 - Denial of credit for contact hours.
 - Insufficient contact hours due to catastrophic natural or personal events.
- ✎ Revocation of certification.



Ineligible for appeals

- ⌘ Failure to complete the certification exam in the time allotted.
- ⌘ The validity of a specific test item.
- ⌘ Failure to meet deadline dates for supporting documentation, audit requests, or any other requests by MSNCB.
- ⌘ Action against the individual's credential due to disciplinary action of the RN license by a licensing authority.
- ⌘ Failure to receive recertification notice. It is your responsibility to apply for recertification and notify MSNCB of any change in name, address, or contact information.

