June 8, 2020

Premed Forum Q&A

On May 14, 2020, the AAMC held a virtual Premed Forum hosted by AAMC President and CEO David Skorton, MD, and other AAMC leaders. Participants submitted more than 900 questions before, during, and after the forum. Understandably, we could not address all questions during the one-hour forum, so this page presents follow-up answers and information to those questions and issues we were unable to address during the live event. We have combined some questions and answers for clarity.

To watch a recording of the Premed Forum, visit https://www.aamc.org/premedresources.

NOTE: This page will not be updated. Please visit the MCAT FAQs and AMCAS FAQs for the most up-to-date information during this rapidly changing environment due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Admissions (General)

1. **Are medical schools modifying their admissions processes due to COVID-19?**

COVID-19 has had far-reaching implications for the ways in which individuals, organizations, and institutions conduct business. The medical school community is committed to flexibility throughout this application cycle. Most MD-granting institutions have updated the Admission policies and information section of their Medical School Admissions Requirements (MSAR) profile to include COVID-19 related adjustments to their admissions policies.

2. **Will the schools that I am applying to accept that I had to take online courses during the Spring 2020 semester?**

Consistent with a commitment to flexibility during this application cycle, approximately 95% of the medical schools reporting updates on admission requirements to the AAMC have indicated that they will consider online coursework, labs, and pass/fail grades for coursework taken during the Spring 2020 semester. For the most current information and policies regarding admission requirements, please visit the website and admissions staff of the specific institution(s) you are applying to.

3. **Will medical schools evaluate my MCAT score differently since I am taking the shortened exam?**

The shortened exam will be evaluated by the same criteria and is considered as an equal exam to the longer exam. Please consult the COVID-19 Changes to MCAT Administrations page, if you have additional questions regarding the MCAT Exam and scoring.
4. **How can I gain practical experience during this time when shadowing, internships, and volunteer experiences are limited, if not canceled altogether?**

When applying for medical school, it is important that your application conveys evidence of empathy, service orientation, ethical responsibility to self and others, and an awareness of what a career as a practicing physician entails, among other characteristics and strengths. Medical schools understand the challenging realities many of you are navigating during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially with the cancellation of your planned research and clinical experiences. However, there are many ways to demonstrate the competencies sought by admissions committees. Here are some alternative ways for you to use this time to develop competencies that demonstrate your readiness for medical school:

- Consider the ways that you are still helping and being of service in your home and community. Developing your knowledge of needs in the community, and this recent U.S. News & World Report article on Volunteer Activities for Premeds During COVID-19 are great places to start!
- Read articles, watch/listen to visual programming and podcasts, and access online learning resources that enhance your knowledge of medicine.
- Visit the AAMC Anatomy of an Applicant website and read student profiles to see how a variety of life experiences can be used to demonstrate the core competencies for entering medical students.
- Continue to engage with advisers, medical professionals, and mentors. These engagements can enhance your knowledge of the field and may provide you with additional opportunities for personal and professional growth and development.

Please access our “Demonstrating Competence in an Unconventional Application Year” webinar to hear directly from admissions Officers about how they are approaching this application cycle.

5. **How are medical schools being sensitive to the unique needs of applicants from underrepresented and underserved communities due to the impact of COVID-19?**

The medical education community remains sensitive to COVID-19’s disproportionate impact on underrepresented and underserved communities and the realities of students as they apply for medical school during this unusual application cycle. We will continue to encourage our member medical schools to develop admissions policies and practices that are equitable and fair.

6. **How are medical schools planning to conduct interviews for this admissions cycle?**

Medical schools remain committed to exploring options that prioritize the health and safety of applicants and staff. Therefore, many schools are planning for a virtual interview season. As more institutions finalize their plans, we will encourage them to make updates to their profiles in the Medical School Admission Requirements (MSAR) and on their school websites. To support your transition to virtual interviewing, the AAMC developed Virtual Interview Tips for Medical School Applicants.
1. Why is the MCAT exam not offered online?

There are several reasons the MCAT exam is not administered online. First, it’s important that all examinees have the right hardware and software programs in addition to a sustained, uninterrupted internet connection. Administering an online exam could provide a disadvantage to examinees who do not have access to the necessary technology or high-speed internet connection required for online testing.

Second, test questions include many complex figures, graphs, and equations that require high resolution to be displayed properly, and it is critical to display high-resolution test content accurately and in the same way for all examinees. It is also important that the technology students use to take the MCAT exam is standardized and provides the best opportunity for examinees to show how well they understand the concepts tested on the exam. The MCAT exam measures examinees’ ability to apply their knowledge to the solution of scientific problems.

Finally, the AAMC has an important responsibility to ensure the validity, security, and integrity of the MCAT exam. Even with center-based administrations, a small number of individuals attempt to gain an unfair advantage on their exam by bringing prohibited items into the testing room or giving or receiving assistance. Small numbers of examinees reveal test questions and answers or reconstruct topics after the exam. Simply stated, online proctored testing cannot have in place the same security protocols as an in-person proctored exam.

2. How is it fair to students who are in locations with longer stay-at-home orders and can’t test vs other students living in locations where they are able to take the test earlier?

We know it is inconvenient for some students who cannot take their exams where or when they want, but health and safety is our top priority. Stay-at-home orders and other restrictions vary between states and counties. As a reminder for examinees who live in areas with longer stay-at-home guidance and non-essential business closures, our testing plan has been designed to increase testing capacity and flexibility during the pandemic. We have increased test appointments by 1.5 times the number we have in a typical year to account for differing health and safety guidance to allow some examinees to test earlier and some later in the testing calendar. There are many appointments available throughout the summer and fall, and they can reschedule at no cost as many times as needed to adjust their plans. We will communicate to examinees approximately 3-4 weeks in advance if test appointments in their locations are at risk of being canceled. We will communicate cancellation decisions 10 days in advance of their exam date.

Medical schools know this is a stressful and highly unusual year for applicants and will be flexible. They are aware of the locations where students are currently unable to test. Applicants should be sure to note their future exam date in their AMCAS application. Medical schools are also adapting quickly to the challenges of COVID-19, and we are continuing to work with the medical school admissions community on solutions to solve those challenges as they arise.
3. **How many passages and discrete questions are on the new shortened MCAT exam?**

You can view the number of questions per section and additional information about the shortened MCAT exam on the [MCAT Coronavirus page](#). For reference, this information is also included below:

The Chemical and Physical Foundations of Biological Systems section includes:

- A total of 48 questions
  - 8 passage-based sets of questions (4-6 questions per set)
  - 12 independent questions

The Critical Analysis and Reasoning section includes:

- A total of 48 questions
  - 8 passages (5-7 questions per passage)

The Biological and Biochemical Foundations of Living Systems section includes:

- A total of 48 questions
  - 8 passage-based sets of questions (4-6 questions per set)
  - 12 independent questions

The Psychological and Sociological Foundations of Behavior section includes:

- A total of 48 questions
  - 8 passage-based sets of questions (4-6 questions per set)
  - 12 independent questions

4. **Due to the nature of this cycle, will medical schools begin reviewing applications if an applicant’s MCAT score is not available yet?**

Each medical school has different admissions requirements. Medical schools are aware of changes to the MCAT administration dates, and they will be flexible with their review policies during this atypical admissions cycle, including planning for later test score availability. Please visit MSAR (Medical School Admission Requirements) to learn how specific schools are adjusting their policies and deadlines during the COVID-19 pandemic. A subscription is not required to access this information.

Please note AMCAS has delayed the first transmission deadline to medical schools by two weeks. Schools will receive the first applications submitted in AMCAS on July 10.

5. **Will more MCAT exams be canceled this year?**

Your health, safety, and well-being is our top priority. The MCAT exam has resumed administrations in most locations, but not all. Going forward, states and their counties and local municipalities are continuing to lift stay-at-home orders and open non-essential businesses at different times. The guidance changes frequently, and we will follow state and local advisories as well as national guidance.
from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention when making decisions to hold or cancel exams. We are committed to keeping you informed about the potential impact of this guidance on existing test appointments. We will notify examinees 3-4 weeks in advance if their exam is “at risk” of cancellation and 10 days in advance if the exam needs to be canceled due to COVID-19 health and safety advisories.

6. Why can’t the AAMC add more testing dates and expedite scores for more test administrations?

There is a science to the way we create the exams to ensure they measure the same knowledge and skills at the same levels of difficulty. There is also a science for scoring tests so that scores have the same meaning for each examinee, no matter when students take the exam and which version of the test they take. We used these scientific principles to create the extraordinary testing and score release schedule we developed for the remaining exam dates in 2020. This schedule also helps guard the security of the exam. While we wish we could add more testing dates and score more tests in two weeks rather than four, the plan we’ve outlined provides as much flexibility as possible given the many variables, such as operational limitations, test security concerns, and scientific principles.

7. Will medical schools evaluate my MCAT score differently since I am taking the shortened exam?

Medical schools will know you took the shortened exam under different conditions. They understand that the test has been shortened, but that you have still been tested on the same concepts and skills at the same levels of difficulty as your peers who took the full-length exam. You will still receive five scores from the exam: one from each of the four sections and one combined total score. Medical schools will continue to rely on holistic review processes knowing that your MCAT scores are one data point among the other rich information and academic data you submit through your transcripts, letters of recommendations, essays, and lived experiences.

AMCAS

1. I heard that sending paper transcripts can delay verification because they can’t be retrieved from the office until the AAMC opens. What will AAMC do to prevent delay from paper transcripts?

Mailed transcripts are sent to a Post Office Box which is not affected by the AAMC’s office closure. Mailed transcripts are being received and processed by AMCAS. Paper transcripts should be mailed to AMCAS along with an AMCAS Pre-barcode Transcript Request Form (found within the application) to help us match your transcript(s) to your application. Mail paper transcripts to: AMCAS, attn: Transcripts, AAMC Medical School Application Services, P.O. Box 57326, Washington, DC 20037.
Please note that due to coronavirus restrictions with the U.S. Postal Service, there are delays in processing paper transcripts. If sent by U.S. mail, most transcripts take 10 calendar days to arrive at AMCAS from your institution. In general, it takes approximately 15 business days from the day your transcript(s) arrive at our facilities for us to process them and mark them as “Received.” You will receive an email from AMCAS once your transcripts are processed.

2. **Is there anything we can do about schools who are not sending any kind of transcripts because they are closed?**

Most schools have indicated transcript delivery should not be impacted. If you believe there will be delays with your transcript(s) from your institution(s), please contact the institution(s) directly to clarify their process and timeline. AMCAS is working with medical schools to understand challenges related to transcript delivery. Medical schools are aware of these issues and taking them into consideration.

3. **Where can transcripts be submitted electronically?**

Please have your Registrar contact etranscripts@aamc.org for email or fax instructions, and include the subject line “Instructions.” AMCAS is equipped to work with third-party vendors that provide transcript fulfillment services as well as with institutions that are approved to send transcripts directly to AMCAS.

4. **Can I still edit my AMCAS application and designate additional medical schools after I have submitted my application and it has gone through the verification process?**

After the initial submission of your application, you may only make changes to the following information:

- Your ID numbers.
- Your name, including full legal name, preferred name, and alternate names.
- Your contact Information, including your permanent address, preferred mailing address, and e-mail address.
- Your alternate contact information.
- Your date of birth and sex.
- Letters of evaluation (although please note that you can only make additions of up to 10 letters, and you must notify AMCAS if you have a letter you wish to no longer be sent to medical schools; you cannot delete letters of evaluation from your application).
- Your next MCAT testing date.
• The addition of medical schools and the altering of existing program types (deadlines, restrictions and an additional fee may apply).

• The release of your application information to your prehealth advisor.

You must re-certify and officially update your application after making a change. This will not cause any processing delays, and you will not be charged unless you have added more medical school designations. Medical school additions or program changes can be made at any time as long as the deadline for the school you wish to add has not passed.

5. **Do letters of recommendation need to be received by the AAMC before the application can be verified?**

No, AMCAS does not need your letters of recommendation to verify and process your application. Once your letters are received by AMCAS, they will be added to your application. If your application has already completed verification, AMCAS will forward your letters to the medical schools designated in your application.

6. **Can your application be verified without an MCAT score? If so, is the application sent to the medical school(s) without the score?**

Yes, AMCAS will verify and process your application without your MCAT scores. Once the scores are made available, AMCAS will upload your scores automatically into the application. If your application has already completed verification, AMCAS will send updates to the medical schools indicated in your application informing them of the update.

7. **How is the AAMC advising medical schools on how to deal with the many students whose applications will not be complete until later in the cycle due to COVID-19?**

Medical schools are aware of the challenges facing applicants during this unprecedented time. Schools are being flexible and taking these issues into consideration when reviewing applications this cycle and screening for applicants. Applicants are also advised to follow school-specific policies and requirements and reference the [Medical School Admission Requirements](https://www.aamc.org/admissions/101576.htm).

8. **Will medical schools be instructed to consider and understand that students will have limited clinical and volunteering hours due to COVID-19?**

The AMCAS Advisory Committee has encouraged schools to take these challenges into consideration when reviewing applications this cycle and screening for applicants. Please check directly with the medical schools to which you are applying to confirm their requirements.

Also, review the “Admissions General” section of this Q&A for ideas on ways to demonstrate competencies during this unusual application cycle.