



Revised Exam Eligibility Criteria Effective for the 2009 IBCLC Certification Exam

The International Board of Lactation Consultant Examiners (IBLCE) is pleased to announce revised eligibility criteria for individuals wishing to become International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLCs). The changes reflect IBLCE's commitment to public safety and to the advancement of the lactation consultant profession.

There are now four ways to become eligible for the exam:

1. Graduate from a lactation specific academic program
2. Be a licensed or registered healthcare professional
3. Be a provider of breastfeeding counseling, in a capacity other than as a healthcare professional, and work or volunteer within a supervised setting
4. Complete a mentored lactation education plan

All eligibility criteria are considered to be minimum requirements. Based upon the individual's training and background, additional coursework or lactation specific clinical practice hours may be needed to successfully complete the examination. In addition, national, regional or local laws may require that you meet more than these minimum requirements. In order to practice, some jurisdictions require that IBCLCs hold a license or registration in a healthcare profession. Questions about such restrictions should be addressed to the regional office serving your country of residence. To find the regional office serving you, visit the IBLCE International website at www.iblce.org

Individuals wishing to take the IBLCE exam in 2009 may qualify through these revised criteria. If you have been working toward exam eligibility under the former pathways, please be assured that the former pathways will continue to be available for another three years. Detailed information about the pathways remains posted on our website www.ams.iblce.org under IBCLC Certification. If you have additional questions about the former pathways, please write to us at pathways@iblce.org.

Following the information on the new eligibility criteria, you will find answers to a number of questions that people are asking. After reading this information, you may still have questions and we are glad to assist you. Due to the staff's need to focus on final preparations for the 2008 exam on July 28, we are unable to answer individual calls and emails at this time. Please continue to watch our website for updates or send your question to require@iblce.org. We will use your email inquiries to provide improved guidance and understanding of these revisions.

Lactation Specific Academic Program

With a vision toward the future and to provide for individuals to enter the profession through post-secondary education, eligibility criteria have been established for individuals who graduate from lactation specific academic programs. IBLCE has established these criteria as the preferred method for IBCLC exam eligibility to encourage the development of more lactation specific academic programs.

The program must be provided at an accredited university, college, or community college and meet the following requirements:

- A minimum of one year of full-time lactation/breastfeeding education (or equivalent) which results in a one-year certificate, a two-year associate degree, or a four-year bachelor's degree.
- A minimum of 90 hours of didactic instruction which covers the IBLCE examination blueprint.
- Primary faculty must be currently certified IBCLCs who have re-certified at least once.
- A minimum of 300 lactation specific clinical practice hours² that are directly supervised³ by currently certified IBCLCs and provided in multiple practice settings.
- Completion of at least one course in each of the six health disciplines recommended by IBLCE⁴ unless already studied as part of the student's professional training.
- Program director is administratively responsible for the program, including having responsibility for monitoring and periodically evaluating the IBCLCs who provide direct supervision.

Licensed/Registered Health Care Professional

The candidate must be licensed or registered in the state, district, territory, province, or country to practice as a health care professional and complete the following requirements:

- A minimum of 45 hours of lactation specific education¹ within the 5 years immediately prior to exam application.
- 1000 lactation specific clinical practice hours² within the 5 years immediately prior to exam application.

Other Provider of Breastfeeding Assistance

This category is available to individuals who provide breastfeeding assistance but are not licensed or registered healthcare professionals. The candidate must be accredited or certified to provide care and counseling to lactating women, must be working or volunteering within an organization that ensures supervision of his/her clinical practice and complete the following requirements:

- A minimum of 45 hours of lactation specific education¹ within the 5 years immediately prior to exam application.
- 2000 lactation specific clinical practice hours² within the 5 years immediately prior to exam application.
- Applicants following these exam eligibility criteria are advised to complete at least one course in each of the six health disciplines recommended by IBLCE⁴.

Mentored Lactation Education Plan

Individuals preparing for exam eligibility through a mentored lactation education plan are not required to have any specific professional or educational background. This mentorship method for IBCLC education (formerly called Pathway F) has the following requirements:

- The mentored lactation education plan is approved by IBLCE **prior to beginning** the directly supervised³ clinical practice requirement.
- Direct supervision³ is provided by one or more currently certified IBCLCs who have recertified at least once. It is the candidate's responsibility to locate and contract with one or more mentors.
- The candidate completes a minimum of 45 hours of lactation specific education¹ within the 5 years immediately prior to exam application. This requirement may be met prior to or concurrent with the required directly supervised³ lactation specific clinical practice² hours.
- Within three (3) years of plan approval, the candidate completes a minimum of 500 directly supervised³ lactation specific clinical practice hours² that covers all the skill sets listed on the **Clinical Competencies for IBCLC Practice**. Clinical practice in at least two settings is highly recommended.
- Applicants participating in a mentored lactation education plan are advised to complete at least one course in each of the six health disciplines recommended by IBLCE⁴.

Definitions

¹ Lactation specific education hours

Education hours acquired by completing programs that provide evidence-based instruction in the disciplines and chronological periods listed on the **IBLCE Exam Blueprint** and/or training in the clinical skills listed in the **Clinical Competencies for IBCLC Practice**. Some areas of the world require more education and candidates should be aware of their country's education requirements. IBLCE strongly recommends that applicants complete a comprehensive lactation education program that integrates all the disciplines and chronological periods listed on the IBLCE Exam Blueprint and is 80-150 hours in length. Lactation education programs accredited by the official accrediting agency of the profession are recommended. Please refer to the IBLCE website and Candidate Information Guide for more information.

² Lactation specific clinical practice hours/Breastfeeding counseling

Clinical practice hours accumulated while providing direct care to pregnant and lactating women and their infants/children within a paid or volunteer capacity.

³Direct supervision

A gradual process which begins with observation, then moves to clinical practice experience under direct observation until the skill is mastered, and culminates in independent practice with a mentor or supervisor physically nearby to assist and offer advice and support. The candidate is expected to complete **all three phases** of directly supervised clinical practice:

1. observation of the mentor, which is **not** included in the required hours of directly supervised clinical practice
2. supervised clinical practice, i.e., working directly with breastfeeding mother-baby dyads under a mentor's **direct observation** and supervision
3. **independent** clinical practice with a mentor available on-site and able to assist if needed

⁴Health discipline background education

IBLCE urges all candidates to complete background education in certain health disciplines. For candidates who are licensed/registered health care professionals this educational content is completed in their professional program. Candidates who are not health care professionals may or may not have studied these subjects during their professional training. College or university courses, adult education courses and on-line or distance learning courses are options candidates may choose. IBLCE recommends completion of education in the following six health disciplines either prior to or concurrent with the lactation specific education and clinical practice experience:

- human anatomy and physiology
- sociology OR cultural sensitivity
- nutrition
- psychology, counseling OR communication skills
- infant and child growth and development
- medical terminology

Questions

Why were the exam eligibility requirements revised?

The complexity of the previous Pathways program was detrimental to the growth of the IBCLC credential. The requirements were confusing to candidates, which required IBLCE staff to spend a lot of time explaining them. The revised requirements are simpler and easier to understand.

In addition, the Board wanted to advance the lactation consultant profession by encouraging the development of lactation education programs at academic institutions and establishing criteria that encouraged younger individuals to seek IBCLC certification.

I am already an IBCLC. How does this affect my certification? Do I need to reapply?

The new criteria apply to new applicants for IBCLC certification. As someone already certified as an IBCLC, your continued certification is based upon IBLCE's recertification requirements which are posted on our website www.ams.iblce.org under Recertification. The only reason that you would need to reapply and might be subject to the new eligibility criteria is if you allow your IBCLC certification to lapse.

When do the new exam eligibility criteria take effect?

You may follow the revised criteria to apply for the 2009 exam.

I have already started preparing for the exam through one of the Pathways. Do I have to start over with the new criteria?

No. For those exam candidates currently following one of the Pathways, we are keeping the Pathways for three more years—until April 30, 2011. Candidates may not combine the former Pathways requirements with the new criteria. They must follow **either** the revised requirements or the former Pathways. Candidates already preparing through the pathways system should contact us at pathways@iblce.org

Why did the Board group all healthcare professionals under one set of eligibility criteria, and other types of breastfeeding counselors under another?

Most exam candidates are healthcare professionals who seek to add the IBCLC credential to their primary license or registration. As a group, they perform extremely well on the exam. This high pass rate supports consolidating all healthcare professionals—regardless of license or registration—under a single set of criteria.

The next largest group of candidates is comprised of accredited mother-to-mother support group leaders, certified breastfeeding counselors/educators, breastfeeding peer counselors and certified postpartum doulas working in a supervised setting. This group also performs well on the exam. The criteria for licensed or registered healthcare professionals as compared to other breastfeeding counselors differ only in the amount of lactation specific clinical practice experience required.

Who is considered to be a healthcare professional?

Registered nurses (with 2, 3 or 4+ year degrees), licensed/registered practical or vocational nurses, licensed physicians, midwives, and registered dietitians are the primary healthcare professionals who apply for the exam. Other professionals such as physical and occupational therapists also qualify. Chiropractors may qualify, depending on the country in which they completed their training and education. Licensure and registration vary from region to region. If you have questions about whether your profession qualifies, contact us at require@iblce.org

Why did the Board reduce the number of clinical practice hours required?

In the past, candidates were allowed to count hours from as far back in their careers as needed to meet the requirement. The new criteria place increased emphasis on recent experience—to ensure that a candidate's clinical practice is based on current best practice in lactation management and care. Fewer hours are now required, but those hours must be within the five years immediately prior to exam application.

Are the six health disciplines no longer required?

Under the former Pathways, candidates were required to complete at least four clock hours of education in each of the six disciplines. It was difficult to verify this requirement and four hours was such a low level of education that we had no evidence it made a difference on exam pass rate.

Under the new criteria, candidates who have not already studied these subjects in their professional training are encouraged to take at least one college-level course in each of the six disciplines. Candidates who have not already taken courses in these subjects are advised to complete at least one course prior to or concurrent with their lactation specific training.

IBLCE requires that lactation specific academic education programs include completion of at least one course in these subjects. Licensed/registered healthcare professionals normally complete education in most of these subjects during their professional training.

IBLCE does not require that candidates who complete a mentored lactation education plan complete courses in these subjects. However, mentors of these plans may require that students complete courses in these subjects.

The issue of college-level education in these health disciplines continues to be explored. Data collected over many years indicate that candidates who complete at least two years of college or university education are more successful on the exam.

Where can I find an academic program in human lactation and breastfeeding that will prepare me for becoming an IBCLC?

At this time, there are two programs. You may get more information about these programs by visiting their websites.

Union Institute and University: <http://www.tui.edu/undergrad/mch.asp>

University of California at San Diego: <http://www.breastfeeding-education.com/>

Can I combine the Supplementary Pathways G and H with the new eligibility criteria?

These supplementary pathways may only be used by applying under the former pathways system. For more information contact us at pathways@iblce.org

I've heard that I can get credit for being a La Leche League Leader. Is this true?

La Leche League Leaders and other accredited volunteer mother-to-mother support group leaders receive credit toward the lactation specific clinical practice requirement. For each year of active service leading group meetings, you receive 500 hours credit toward the clinical practice requirement. If your service has been phone counseling only, you receive 25 hours credit. If you have more questions about this, please write us at require@iblce.org

I am a registered nurse but have no experience as a nurse helping mothers with breastfeeding. However, I've been a La Leche League Leader for the past six years. Which criteria should I use?

You may apply under the category for other providers of breastfeeding assistance and use your LLL Leader experience to count toward your lactation specific clinical practice hours.

I'm a dietician (or I'm a peer counselor at the WIC clinic, etc.) at the local hospital. How do I calculate my clinical practice hours?

Healthcare professionals who provide direct breastfeeding assistance and care may use their work experience to meet the clinical practice requirement. Other providers such as, but not limited to, breastfeeding peer counselors, breastfeeding educators and childbirth educators may also count their paid or volunteer work experience.

When you apply, you will be asked to estimate your clinical experience hours by providing us with information about where you worked or volunteered, how long you have worked there and what percentage of your time on the job has been spent assisting breastfeeding families. The application form will guide you through the process of converting your work experience into clinical practice hours.

Okay, but I've heard that calculating the hours is difficult and that you can count only a certain percentage of time providing group or telephone counseling?

We are aware that this calculation has been a stumbling block in the past. In the Americas region we hope to have online application available for the 2009 exam. This should alleviate a lot of problems. If the online application process is not launched in 2009, I assure you that the application form will be simpler than the one used under the former Pathways system.

The percentages you speak of apply to candidates applying under the former Pathways system. Under the new criteria these percentages have been discontinued. So long as you provide direct care to mothers and babies in a supervised setting, it does not matter what percentage of that time is one-on-one vs. group or telephone counseling. Candidates applying under the Pathways system are still subject to the percentages specified for clinical practice hours.

How do I get a 2009 Candidate Information Guide?

The Guide will be available by September 2008. If you wish a print copy, please email us at exam@iblce.org to request a copy. Include your home mailing address, phone number and email address.

Check the website www.ams.iblce.org. Most likely the Guide will be posted there before it is available in print.