



ABMS Board Eligibility Overview and FAQs

Updated May 2018

Specialty Certification

The ABMS Board Eligibility Policy, effective January 1, 2012, limits the period of time that may elapse between a physician's completion of training and achievement of initial certification in a specialty. The Member Boards established transition dates for physician candidates who had completed training, but not yet achieved initial certification in a specialty as of the ABMS Board Eligibility Policy's effective date.

BOARD ELIGIBLE PERIODS AND TRANSITION DATES		
American Board of	Board Eligible Period (+practice requirement)	Transition Date
Allergy and Immunology	5 years	*
Anesthesiology	7 years	1/1/2019
Colon and Rectal Surgery ¹	7 years	12/31/2023
Dermatology	5 years	*
Emergency Medicine	5 years	12/31/2019
Family Medicine	7 years	1/1/2019
Internal Medicine	7 years	1/1/2019
Medical Genetics and Genomics	7 years	1/1/2019
Neurological Surgery	5 years	12/31/2018
Nuclear Medicine	7 years	*
Obstetrics and Gynecology	7 (+1) years	12/31/2018
Ophthalmology	7 years	1/1/2019
Orthopaedic Surgery ²	5 years	*
Otolaryngology	5 years	1/1/2019
Pathology	5 years	1/1/2019
Pediatrics ³	7 years	*
Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation	7 years	12/31/2019
Plastic Surgery	7 (+1) years	1/1/2019
Preventive Medicine	7 years	1/1/2019
Psychiatry and Neurology	7 years	1/1/2019
Radiology	6 years	*
Surgery	7 years	7/1/2022
Thoracic Surgery	7 years	*
Urology	6 years	*

* These Member Boards had board eligibility policies in place prior to the effective date of the ABMS Policy. They aligned their board eligible periods with the principles of the policy.

¹ Colon and Rectal surgery requires candidates to pass the written examination given by the American Board of Surgery. Candidates have 7 years to complete both written and oral examinations after application approval.

² Orthopaedic Surgery candidates have 5 years to achieve certification after passing the written examination.

³ The board eligible period for Pediatrics is 7 years for those who completed their training in 2007 or later. For those who completed their training prior to 2007, the transition period ended on 12/31/2013.



Subspecialty Certification

The ABMS Eligibility Policy for Subspecialty Certification, effective January 1, 2018, limits the period of time that may elapse between a physician’s training and achievement of initial certification in a subspecialty. ABMS Member Boards that do not have an existing policy in place are expected to establish and implement a transition plan. This period can be up to 7 years following the successful completion of training, plus time (if any) in practice as required by the board for admissibility to the certifying examination.

BOARD ELIGIBLE PERIODS AND TRANSITION DATES		
American Board of	Eligibility Period following completion of training (+practice requirement)	Transition Date
Anesthesiology	7 years	*
Dermatology	5 years	*
Emergency Medicine	7 years	*
Family Medicine	7 years	*
Internal Medicine	7 years	*
Medical Genetics and Genomics	7 years	*
Obstetrics and Gynecology	8 years	January 1, 2020
Orthopaedic Surgery ¹	7 (+2) years	*
Otolaryngology		January 1, 2025
Pathology ²	7 years	*
Pediatrics	7 years	*
Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation	7 years	*
Plastic Surgery ³	7 (+2) years)	*
Preventive Medicine	7 years	*
Psychiatry and Neurology	7 years	*
Radiology	10 years	January 1, 2025
Surgery ⁴		January 1, 2025
Thoracic Surgery ⁵	7 years	*
Urology ⁶	6 years	*

* These Member Boards had board eligibility policies in place prior to the effective date of the ABMS Policy. They aligned their board eligible periods with the principles of the policy.

¹ Orthopaedic Surgery allows a maximum of 9 years to complete certification in Surgery of the Hand. This policy also applies to Sports Medicine, pending review by the board.

² The Pathology eligibility period starts from the completion of subspecialty training or primary certification, whichever is later.

³ Plastic Surgery allows a maximum of 7 years to complete certification after application, except for Surgery of the Hand which is 9 years.

⁴ Surgery extends the time limit an additional 5 years for subspecialties with a required oral exam.

⁵ Thoracic Surgery requires diplomates to apply within 1 year of completing training.

⁶ Urology allows a maximum of 3 years to complete certification after application.



1. Where can I view the ABMS Member Boards' Eligibility periods and transition dates?

Please see the charts above. They outline the time limits established by each Member Board.

2. Why was the policy established?

The ABMS Board Eligibility Policy and the ABMS Eligibility Policy for Subspecialty Certification recognize physicians' need to use the term "board eligible" as a way to signal their preparations for certification. At the same time, it closes off the potential for abuse through use of the term indefinitely. The establishment of this policy tightens the connection between training and certification. Research has shown repeatedly that physicians lose knowledge and skills as the years pass after their training. The requirements of the ABMS MOC program address this problem through continuous professional development. The policies limit the time that can elapse before physicians are certified and therefore participating in MOC.

3. Why is ABMS creating this range rather than one all-purpose limit?

The Member Boards have different requirements for certification and different schedules for certifying exams. The flexibility in the time frame recognizes this simple fact.

4. Will there be any exceptions to the new limits?

The ABMS Member Boards may grant exceptions in instances of military deployment, acute illness, or other special circumstances.