



2026 National Dental Hygiene Certification Examination Blueprint

BACKGROUND

Successful completion of the National Dental Hygiene Certification Examination (NDHCE) is required for registration with provincial and territorial regulators in Canada. The purpose of the NDHCE Blueprint is to depict the major content areas of the exam, provide a structural map indicating the relative distribution of desired content and reflect the way in which exam questions are coded. In addition, the Blueprint provides direction to the item generation process, the construction of each exam and informs candidates and other interested parties of the main exam areas. It ensures that candidates are tested in a fair and comparable manner across exam administrations, despite completing different exams.

The previous NDHCE Blueprint was built around a competency profile that was developed specifically for the exam (the NDHCE Competency Profile [2016]). The updated Blueprint uses the competency domains described in the 2021 [Entry to Practice Canadian Competencies for Dental Hygienists \(EPCCoDH\)](#):

- A Professionalism
- B Evidence-informed Practice
- C Communication
- D Collaboration
- E Practice Management
- F Prevention, Education, and Health Promotion
- G Clinical Therapy

This Blueprint must be used in conjunction with the [EPCCoDH](#), found on the FDHRC website.

The following NDHCE Blueprint was approved by the FDHRC Board of Directors on February 24, 2025, for implementation in exams in **May 2026 onwards**.

NDHCE BLUEPRINT

Structural Variables

Structural variables include those characteristics that determine the general appearance and design of the exam. They define the length of the exam, the format/presentation of the exam items (e.g., multiple-choice format), the distribution of questions by domains of expertise, and special functions of exam items (e.g., to measure a competency within the cognitive domain).

Examination Length and Format

The Examination is a fully computer-based exam and is administered over a period of four (4) hours. The NDHCE has 200 questions, 170 of which will be scored with the remaining 30 left unscored. The exam is broken into two unique sections of 100 questions each, with two hours allotted to complete each section.

GENERAL PARAMETERS	N
Total number of questions	200
Number of scored (operational) items	170
Number of unscored (experimental) items	30

Item Presentation

The multiple-choice items are presented in one of two formats: independent and case-based items. Case-based items are a set of a minimum of four to six items associated with a brief case scenario (e.g., a description of the client’s age, general and oral health issues, etc.). Items presented on the exam will also reflect current dental hygiene practices including dental radiographs, intraoral photographs, and clients’ dental chart.

The scored portion of the exam, which includes 170 items, represents 70-80% of independent items and 20–30% of case-based items.

Domains of Expertise

The EPCCoDH are grouped into seven domains of expertise for dental hygienists in Canada. The exam is developed to ensure all domains of expertise, and their corresponding competencies are assessed. The table below represents the percentage of scored items for each of these domains of expertise on the exam.

DOMAIN OF EXPERTISE	PERCENTAGE OF SCORED ITEMS
A Professionalism	5–11%
B Evidence-informed Practice	2–8%
C Communication	2–8%
D Collaboration	11–17%
E Practice Management	5–11%
F Prevention, Education, and Health Promotion	17–23%
G Clinical Therapy	37–43%
TOTAL	100%

Cognitive Domains

To ensure that competencies are measured at different levels of cognitive ability, each item on the Examination is classified into one of three levels: Knowledge/Comprehension; Application; or Critical Thinking. These cognitive domains are adapted from the *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, the classification of educational goals – Handbook I: Cognitive Domains* from B.S. Bloom et al (1956).

1. Knowledge/Comprehension

This domain combines the ability to recall previously learned material and to understand its meaning. It includes mental abilities such as knowing and understanding definitions, facts, and principles.

2. Application

This domain refers to the ability to apply knowledge and learning to new or practical situations. It includes applying rules, methods, principles, and dental hygiene theories in providing care to clients.

3. Critical Thinking

This domain deals with higher-level thinking processes. It includes the ability to judge the relevance of data, to analyse and synthesize information and to solve problems (e.g., identifying priorities of care, evaluating the effectiveness of interventions provided). The dental hygienist should be able to identify cause-and-effect relationships, distinguish between relevant and irrelevant data, formulate valid conclusions, and make judgments concerning the needs of clients.

COGNITIVE EXPERTISE	PERCENTAGE OF SCORED ITEMS
Knowledge/Comprehension	10–20%
Application	55–65%
Critical Thinking	20–30%

Contextual Variables

The NDHCE represents the demographic and cultural realities of the Canadian population that requires dental hygiene care in a variety of practice settings. Therefore, when appropriate, the exam items may specify a client age or gender. Furthermore, the exam is designed to include items representing the variety of cultural backgrounds encountered while providing dental hygiene care in Canada. While the exam does not test candidates' knowledge of specific values, beliefs, and practices linked to individual cultures, it is intended to measure awareness, sensitivity, and respect for diverse cultural values, beliefs, and practices. Cultural issues are integrated within the exam without introducing cultural stereotypes or biases. In addition, as the profession of dental hygiene can be practiced in a variety of settings and most of the competencies are not setting dependent, the practice setting is only specified when required. Finally, candidates should expect items that include images, such as radiographs and clinical photos.

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For questions regarding the Blueprint, please contact the FDHRC directly at exam@fdhrc.ca.