

# CPHN Study Tips

## preparing for a certification exam

**October 2026**

CPHN Certified in Public Health NURSING

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# Where do I begin?

Taking a certification exam can be stressful and challenging. NBPHE has provided several strategies to help you confidently prepare for and take the test. These include studying for the exam, preparing yourself mentally and physically, and test-taking strategies to use during the exam.

## Studying for the Exam

Studying for a certification exam is one of the most important things you can do to prepare for the exam. This process requires you to know where you are currently, where you want to be, and how you will get there. Here are some tips for studying, and you can use the CPHN Personal Action Plan worksheet to guide your strategy to prepare for the CPHN certification exam.

1. **Familiarize yourself with the test and your current knowledge.**
   Get familiar with the CPHN exam by reviewing the **CPHN Content Outline** and the **CPHN Question Anatomy** guide. The Content Outline shows you what the exam covers, while the Question Anatomy guide will help you understand how exam questions are structured and how to approach one-best-answer questions.

   Once you're familiar with the content and question format, take the **CPHN Practice Exam**. Take it early enough in your preparation that you have time to use what you learn from it. The goal isn't simply to earn a high score. Use your results to identify which areas of the CPHN Content Outline feel familiar and which require more attention.

   Review the questions you missed and consider **why** you missed them. Did you need more knowledge about the topic? Did you misunderstand what the question was asking? Were you deciding between two reasonable answers? Use what you learn to decide where to focus your study time.

   At the end of your self-assessment, you should have a clearer picture of your strongest domain areas and those that need more attention.

2. **Use study methods that make you retrieve and apply what you know.**
   Reading or reviewing information can help you become familiar with the material, but effective exam preparation also requires you to practice recalling and applying what you have learned.

   As you study, use a mix of approaches:

   - **Practice retrieving information.** Use flashcards, practice questions, or close your notes and explain a concept from memory.
   - **Explain concepts in your own words.** If you can clearly explain why something is done, not just recognize the terminology, you are more likely to understand it.
   - **Apply concepts to realistic situations.** Use case examples and scenarios to

practice deciding what you would do and why.

- **Space your studying over time.** Several shorter study sessions are generally more useful than one long cram session.
- **Mix topics as you progress.** Once you've reviewed individual areas, practice moving among different topics rather than studying only one domain at a time.
- **Use different formats when they help.** Diagrams, notes, discussion, videos, flashcards, and practice questions can all reinforce your understanding.

### 3. Find study resources.

As you review the available information, think about which resources will be the most valuable to you. There are many resources out there, and collecting everyone will be time-consuming and may not be the best use of your time. Focus on resources that address the topics you need to strengthen and help you actively practice and apply what you're learning.

A great place to start with resources supplied by NBPHE is on the CPHN Study Resources page. These resources will include on-demand webinars covering each domain, links to study tools, flashcards, and the content outline.

### 4. Develop a study plan.

The CPHN exam requires you to understand and apply knowledge across the content areas, so a thoughtful study plan can help you prepare.

When making a study plan:

- Organize your time around the topic areas you need to cover and estimate how much time each will take. Estimating time will help you determine the amount of time you need to prepare for the exam and assist in establishing priority times for areas you need to concentrate on the most.
- Create a weekly schedule, including the number of study hours per day, to stay on track and avoid cramming at the last minute.
- Pick a specific place to study to keep your materials organized in one place and stay in the proper mindset for learning.
- Schedule several smaller study sessions to pick your most alert times and help prevent fatigue.
- Set aside a few minutes to review the material from the last session at the beginning of each study session.
- Review what you have just covered at the end of each study session.
- Be sure to schedule breaks to stretch your legs and clear your mind.

You can organize yourself by using the CPHN Personal Action Plan to write down your study plan, including the timeframe and strategy for each topic you want to devote time to study.

Candidates typically spend one to six months preparing for the CPHN exam, depending on their familiarity with the exam content and the amount of time they can devote to studying. If you're less familiar with some areas of the content outline, you may want to begin several months ahead. If you have extensive professional experience across the content areas, you may need less time. Everyone's study plan is unique, so choose a realistic schedule that gives you enough time to study consistently without relying on last-minute cramming.

## Mental and Physical Preparedness for the Exam

In addition to a study plan, it's essential to familiarize yourself with the exam logistics and be physically and mentally prepared. Here are NBPHE's suggestions to be in the right mindset on exam day.

1. **Know the rules.**
   Make sure you are familiar with the information about what is permitted in the test center/at-home* testing space *(*download testing software, perform system checks, have your mobile device charged and ready as the second camera)*, identification requirements, and the time allotted for the test. The best resource to find this information is the Candidate Handbook.

2. **Get organized the night before.**
   Have everything you need ready for your exam the night before. Set an alarm to allow time for a healthy breakfast and to get to your exam destination with ample time or boot up your computer.

3. **Get a good night's sleep.**
   Get a good night's sleep for several nights before the test. Do not cram the night before. It is much harder to concentrate and retain information when we are tired.

4. **Eat a healthy meal and stay hydrated.**
   Eat a meal that works well for you before the test and stay hydrated. You want to be comfortable and able to focus during the exam.

5. **Show up early for the exam.**
   At a testing center, the check-in process at the testing center requires that you sign in and present a valid ID, usually a government issue photo ID such as a driver's license or passport. Plan on arriving at least 30 minutes before the exam. Also, consider traffic patterns and unexpected traffic jams.

   If you are taking the exam online, do a system check ahead of time to ensure your computer will work with the testing portal.

   You want to start your exam relaxed. If you show up late or have technical difficulties, you may lose valuable time you could be spending on the exam.

6. **Be confident.**
   Remember that you have prepared for this exam and bring your own knowledge and experience with you. The CPHN exam assesses knowledge and skills across the full scope of public health nursing practice, so some areas may be more familiar to you than others. Trust your preparation, read each question carefully, and apply what you know.
   And remember, if the worst occurs, there are always options to retest.

## Test-Taking Strategies During the Exam

You've studied and prepared yourself physically and mentally. Now it's time to take the exam! The following are NBPHE's suggested strategies to use while taking the exam.

1. **Manage your time well.**
   The CPHN exam contains 120 questions and is three hours long, giving you an average of about 90 seconds per question. Some questions, particularly scenario-based questions, may take longer than others, so keep a steady pace and avoid spending too much time on any one question. Remember, there's a built-in break during the exam and you will not be able to go back and review the questions completed prior to the break.

   Work steadily, answer questions you can answer, flag difficult ones when the system permits it, and return to them if time and exam navigation allow.

   Remember, any single question is less than one percent of the exam content, so it is essential that you spend only a little bit of time on any given question.

2. **Read questions carefully.**
   The most common error people make on a multiple-choice exam is to misread and misinterpret the questions. Avoid jumping to conclusions about what you think the question asks. Read through each question and response option twice if necessary.

3. **Focus on the keywords.**
   Make note of the keywords in the question to ensure you grasp the meaning of the question. Also, watch out for qualifying words. Words like must, all, and always are more restrictive and absolute than words like may, most, and frequently which have greater latitude.

   Questions with negatives (e.g., avoid, least, except) can affect the overall meaning of the question. Try rephrasing the question yourself to ensure you understand it before answering it.

4. **Predict the answer.**
   Cover the answers and read the question. Try to predict what the correct answer will be. Once you have an answer, scan the response options to see if your prediction is one of the choices. Check the other answers to be sure, but most likely, it is your initial answer.

5. **Eliminate response options you know to be incorrect.**
   Ask yourself, "What is this question asking?" and "What do I know about that?". Asking yourself those questions will start you thinking about the subject, and you can jot down what you can remember. Now look at the answers and mark out those you know to be incorrect. You can usually narrow it down to two answers.

6. **Look for context clues.**
   Look for and understand the context of the question. More than one answer may look right, but one will fit the context better. Look at the options you think may be correct and ask yourself, "What makes those two options different?" then go back to the question to test each option again.

7. **Guess if you don't know.**
   There is no penalty for answering questions incorrectly. Your score is based on the number of correct answers. You are better off guessing than leaving the question blank if you do not know the answer. Try to use the strategies above, but if nothing else, pick an answer.

8. **Double-check your work.**
   If time permits, review flagged questions and your answers before completing the exam. You may feel nervous and second-guess yourself. If you want to change an answer, determine why your first response is incorrect. If you decide there is a good reason to change it, then do it.

9. **Relax.**
   Standardized exams can be nerve-wracking, and you must maintain your confidence. If you feel nervous at the beginning of the exam, give yourself a moment to settle in and focus on one question at a time. Maintain a steady pace, use the strategies above when you encounter a difficult question, and trust the preparation you've done.

Remember, if you've followed the tips above, you are prepared.