



Salary Guides

Med-Surg Nurse Salary Guide

By **Moira K. McGhee** | Jan 02, 2023

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Medical-surgical nursing, or med-surg for short, is one of the most demanding nursing specialties and requires an extensive skill set and nursing knowledge. Med-surg nurses make up the largest group of practicing nurses. As such, they typically earn a competitive wage but less than registered nurses (RN) working in certain specialties. In this guide, we explore med-surg nursing salaries for staff and travel nurse roles, salaries by location, various factors that can impact med-surg nursing pay and how med-surg salaries compare to other nursing specialties based on **Vivian's salary data** during the last week of 2022.

How to Become a Med-Surg Nurse

To enter the **medical-surgical nursing field**, you must earn a minimum of an **Associate Degree in Nursing** from an accredited nursing school. However, many employers now require RNs to have a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN). Graduate nurses must **pass the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX)** before applying for their state nursing license. The NCLEX, developed by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing, tests graduate nurses' competency and is a national exam used for **RN licensure** in all 50 states.

RN licensure candidates may apply for a single-state license through the Board of Nursing that serves the state where they live or where they plan to practice. However, they must apply in their home state if they live in a nurse licensure compact state and want a multi-state license.

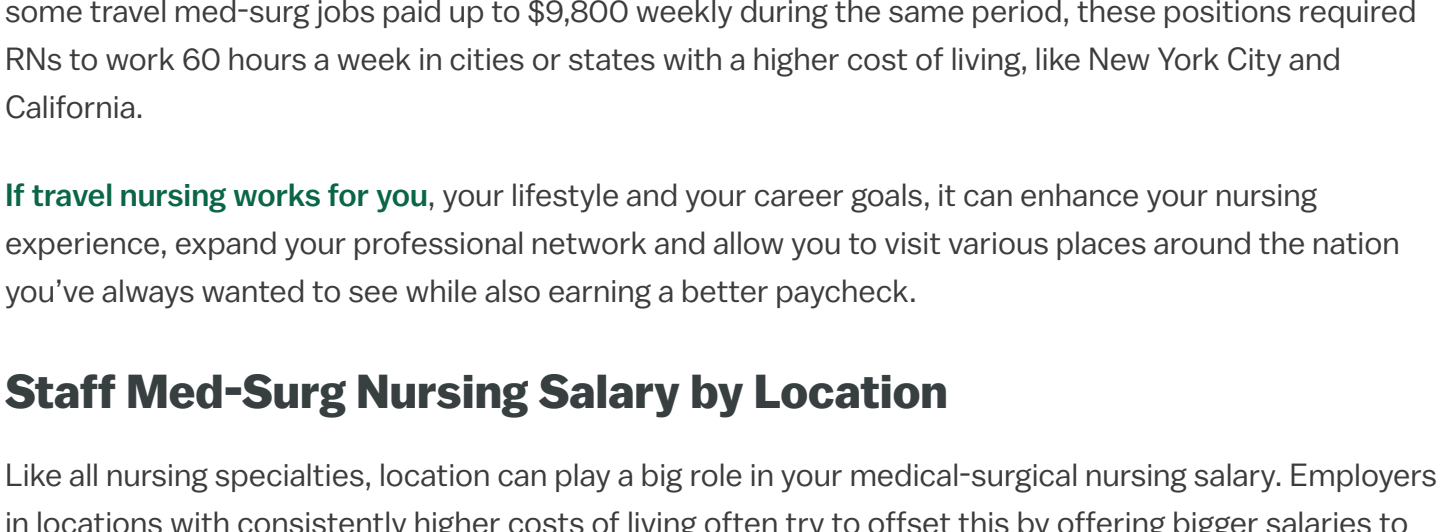
How Much Does a Med-Surg Nurse Make?

Based on **staff medical-surgical jobs** posted on Vivian, the average hourly rate was \$41, but some positions paid up to \$64 per hour. Higher-paying nursing positions tend to be managerial, bringing the hourly range for non-supervisory med-surg roles to \$35 to \$60 per hour based on the job location and work schedule.

When you receive a job offer, your potential employer may also base your salary on several factors, including the following:

- **Experience:** Many employers prefer med-surg candidates with previous nursing experience, including a certain number of years in med-surg nursing. Depending on the exact role they're hiring the medical-surgical nurse to fill, employers may also accept previous experience in other specialties, such as critical care. Experienced med-surg RNs typically start at higher wages than those without experience.
- **Certifications:** All med-surg nursing jobs require you to earn Basic Life Support certification, and some may prefer or even require candidates to have Advanced Cardiac Life Support certification. Further certification isn't usually required, but it can make you a more desirable candidate. Medical-surgical nurses have two professional certifications available. The Certified Medical-Surgical Registered Nurse (CMSRN) credential through the Academy of Medical-Surgical Nurses or Medical-Surgical Nursing Board Certification (MEDSURG-BC) through the American Nurses Credentialing Center both validate your knowledge and skills as a med-surg nurse and could open doors to better positions and higher salaries.
- **Education:** Although many med-surg nursing positions don't require a BSN degree, some employers may offer higher wages to applicants with their BSN, especially those looking to earn Magnet status. Employers may also give preferential treatment to candidates who are eligible and willing to enroll in a BSN program within a set period following employment but still prefer those already holding a BSN.
- **Job duties:** Med-surg nurses with supervisory experience may qualify for certain managerial positions, which usually pay significantly more due to the additional responsibilities involved.

How Much Do Travel Med-Surg Nurses Make?



Travel nursing jobs typically pay more than staff positions, sometimes much more. This is true of **travel med-surg nurse jobs**, which paid an average of \$2,495 per week based on jobs posted on Vivian. While some travel med-surg jobs paid up to \$9,800 weekly during the same period, these positions required RNs to work 60 hours a week in cities or states with a higher cost of living, like New York City and California.

If **travel nursing works for you**, your lifestyle and your career goals, it can enhance your nursing experience, expand your professional network and allow you to visit various places around the nation you've always wanted to see while also earning a better paycheck.

Staff Med-Surg Nursing Salary by Location

Like all nursing specialties, location can play a big role in your medical-surgical nursing salary. Employers in locations with consistently higher costs of living often try to offset this by offering bigger salaries to attract clinicians. Thus, some positions with significantly larger paychecks may not seem as lucrative as you initially thought. When comparing med-surg nursing salary by location, consider the overall cost of living in the state or city to help determine how much money you're actually gaining.

The following table offers some staff med-surg nursing salary comparisons by state, including the five states with the highest average pay and five states with lower wages combined with relatively low costs of living based on the national average.

State	Average Hourly Pay	Max Hourly Pay	Overall Cost of Living
California	\$54	\$79	49.9% higher
Hawaii	\$50	\$63	65.7% higher
District of Columbia	\$46	\$64	50.6% higher
Massachusetts	\$45	\$68	27.5% higher
Oregon	\$45	\$59	14.3% higher
Texas	\$36	\$50	5.8% lower
Illinois	\$35	\$50	6.3% lower
Florida	\$33	\$50	3.1% higher
Missouri	\$31	\$44	14.4% lower
Oklahoma	\$31	\$40	17.8% lower

Sources: **Vivian Health** and **Sperling's Best Places**

Florida is one of the few exceptions where the average medical-surgical nurse salary is lower than average, but the state's overall cost of living is slightly higher than the national average. However, employees in Florida don't pay state income taxes and have the added perk of **living in the Sunshine State**. Eight other states also don't collect state income taxes, including Texas.

Travel Med-Surg Nursing Salary by Location

For those med-surg nurses who travel instead of remaining in one location as part of the staff, the highest-paying locations may differ from those of permanent nurses and can vary from week to week based on demand. **Travel nursing pay** also differs because travelers may receive a blended rate, meaning some of their earnings is untaxed.

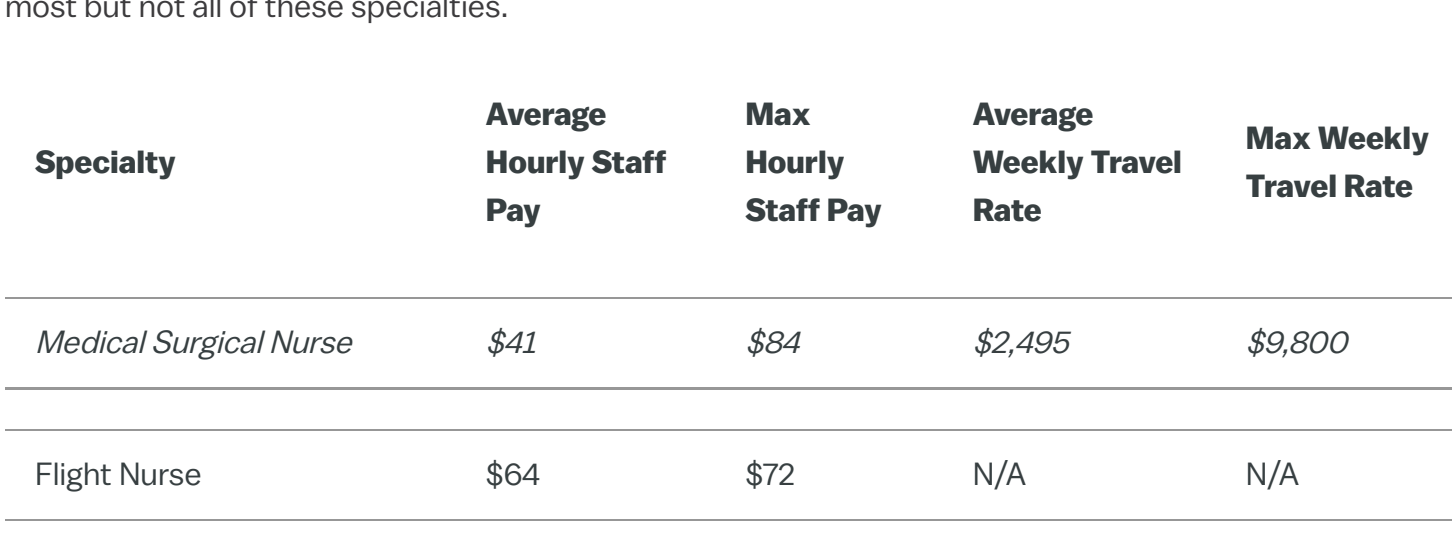
While you should still consider the overall cost of living in the state compared to the weekly salary for a given assignment, living costs don't always have as much bearing on travel wages. Staffing shortages and immediate needs can drive up pay even in areas with lower living costs, and budget constraints can drive down wages in areas with higher costs. Thus, the areas with the **highest-paying travel nursing roles** may sometimes surprise you.

The following table provides the top five paying states for travel med-surg roles and the same five lower-paying states featured in the staff table above.

State	Average Hourly Pay	Max Hourly Pay	Overall Cost of Living
New Jersey	\$3,017	\$4,795	19.8% higher
North Dakota	\$2,987	\$4,480	11.4% lower
California	\$2,963	\$6,250	49.9% higher
Minnesota	\$2,902	\$5,229	2.8% lower
Oregon	\$2,856	\$4,754	14.3% higher
Illinois	\$2,718	\$5,103	6.3% higher
Missouri	\$2,468	\$4,347	14.4% lower
Oklahoma	\$2,283	\$3,409	17.8% lower
Texas	\$2,056	\$3,424	5.8% lower
Florida	\$1,793	\$3,284	3.1% higher

Sources: **Vivian Health** and **Sperling's Best Places**

Staff Med-Surg Nursing Salary Compared to Other Specialties



Med-surg nurses care for patients with various acute medical conditions and those requiring surgical interventions, hence the name. However, med-surg often acts as an umbrella term that covers any RN not working within a specific specialty. Med-surg nursing is often the foundation of nursing at many healthcare facilities. Some facilities may even require med-surg experience to transition to certain other nursing specialties. However, the med-surg specialty doesn't always pay as well as other specialties.

The following table offers a salary comparison of staff and travel med-surg nursing versus the **highest-paying RN specialties**. As you can see from this comparison, the average hourly rate for staff med-surg nurses is lower than all the top-paying specialties listed. Conversely, average travel wages are lower than most but not all of these specialties.

Specialty	Average Hourly Staff Pay	Max Hourly Staff Pay	Average Weekly Travel Rate	Max Weekly Travel Rate
Medical Surgical Nurse	\$41	\$64	\$2,495	\$9,800
Flight Nurse	\$64	\$72	N/A	N/A
Cardiothoracic Intensive Care Unit Nurse	\$55	\$55	\$2,623	\$3,801
Long-Term Care Nurse	\$54	\$87	\$2,116	\$4,008
Risk Management Nurse	\$54	\$54	N/A	N/A
Nephrology Nurse	\$53	\$55	\$2,480	\$2,952
Urgent Care Nurse	\$50	\$55	\$2,608	\$3,600
Wound Care Nurse	\$49	\$83	\$2,637	\$4,968
Pediatric Intensive Care Unit Nurse	\$49	\$66	\$3,466	\$8,708
Pain Management Nurse	\$49	\$65	N/A	N/A
Hematology/Oncology Nurse	\$49	\$55	\$2,955	\$3,868

Source: **Vivian Health**

How to Increase Your Med-Surg Salary

One of the best ways to increase your staff med-surg salary is to earn professional certifications. Whether you earn your CMSRN or MEDSURG-BC credential, you must have a valid, unencumbered RN license. For the CMSRN, you must have practiced two years in a medical-surgical setting and accrued 2,000 hours of practice within the past three years. Earning the MEDSURG-BC requires two years of full-time practice as a registered nurse, with at least 2,000 practice hours and 30 continuing education hours in med-surg nursing within the past three years. Both certifications require you to pay a fee and pass an exam.

Another possible way to boost your med-surg nursing pay is to go back to school and earn an advanced degree. This is especially true if you entered the field with an ADN when a BSN is becoming the standard preference at many facilities. RN-to-BSN bridge programs offer a quicker way to earn your degree while still working. If you already have your BSN, consider earning your Master of Science in Nursing to make you more desirable for roles with greater responsibility. Managerial positions within med-surg usually provide a significant pay increase.

No matter your career goals, if you're looking for your next nursing job, Vivian can help. Our **job board** typically has more than 100,000 staff, travel, per diem or local contract jobs for nurses and allied health workers at any given time, with new jobs added regularly. By **creating a Vivian Universal Profile**, you can access transparent salary data and **unbiased employer reviews** to make your job search easier than ever before.

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Moira K. McGhee is Vivian's Content Writer & Editor. As part of the Vivian Health team, she strives to help support the empowerment of nurses and other medical professionals in their pursuits to find top-notch travel, staff, per diem and local contract positions.

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