ER BASICS · ONE-PAGER

CEN Exam Guide

BCEN Certified Emergency Nurse: format, the July 2026 outline, eligibility and an 8-week plan

22 sources + more detail
erbasics.com/sheets/guide-cen.html
checked Oct 2026

1 The exam at a glance

FEATURE	CEN
Questions	175: 150 scored, 25 unscored pretest
Time	3 hours of seat time; 5 practice items to learn the software
Item type	Multiple choice, 4 options, one best answer
Format	Fixed length, not adaptive
Passing standard	99 of 150 scored items correct
Cost	$380; ENA member $285; military $195
Retest	Unlimited, 90 days apart; $200 within 1 year
Test Assurance	$450 ($355 ENA, $265 military); covers a second attempt
Where	PSI test center or Live Remote Proctoring, within your 90-day window
Results	Pass/fail at once, scores by domain
Credential	Valid 4 years

EXAM TIP You score one point per right answer and lose nothing for a wrong guess, so answer every item. BCEN does not say which 25 items are pretest, so treat each one as scored. Allow about 1 minute per item.

2 What is on it

Outline effective July 6, 2026.

Item counts are BCEN's; shares are rounded from 150.

DOMAIN	ITEMS	SHARE
Cardiovascular	18	12%
Respiratory	17	11%
Neurological	17	11%
Gastrointestinal	14	9%
GU, gynecology, obstetrics	10	7%
Mental health	13	9%
Medical	15	10%
Musculoskeletal and wound	11	7%
Head, eye, ear, nose, throat	10	7%
Environment, toxicology, communicable disease	13	9%
Professional issues	12	8%
Total	150	100%

EXAM TIP Cardiovascular, respiratory and neurological add up to 52 items, about a third of your score.

EXAM TIP There is no trauma domain. Trauma is tested inside each system (chest, head and spine, abdomen, GU/OB, face and eye) and in Musculoskeletal and Wound.

- Shock: cardiogenic and obstructive (Cardiovascular), hypovolemic and distributive, plus sepsis (Medical), neurogenic (Neurological)
- Overdose: intentional (Mental Health), substance use and withdrawal (Medical), CO, cyanide, acids and alkalis (Toxicology)
- Pediatrics has no domain: croup, intussusception and neonatal resuscitation sit in the systems
- Easy to miss: forensic evidence, drug diversion, workplace violence, cultural humility

Changed from the 2022 outline:

- Gastrointestinal is its own domain; GI plus GU/GYN/OB rose from 18 to 24 items
- HEENT replaces Maxillofacial and Ocular
- Professional Issues: Prioritization (triage, mass casualty, throughput) plus Legal and ethical
- No longer listed: envenomation, pain management, procedural sedation

3 Who can take it

- Current, unencumbered RN license in the US, a US territory, Canada or Australia
- RN-equivalent license from another country: accepted once verified through TruMerit
- Two years of emergency experience recommended, not required
- No current clinical job needed
- Any active restriction, suspension or probation disqualifies you
- English only, in every country

4 How to study: an 8-week plan

1. Week 1: read BCEN's outline and 10 sample questions (they show format, not difficulty), then take a full Mock Exam as a baseline.
2. Weeks 1-2: Cardiovascular, Respiratory, Neurological; Rhythm Gallery and ACLS Algorithms in Brief Cheat Sheets.
3. Weeks 3-4: Medical, GI, GU/GYN/OB, Mental Health; Sepsis Bundle, Shock Types and Electrolyte Cheat Sheets.
4. Weeks 5-6: Musculoskeletal and Wound, HEENT, Environment/Toxicology, Professional Issues.
5. Every day: clear Daily Review first; spaced repetition brings back questions you missed or were unsure of.
6. Every week: one Weakest Subject session and a pass through Trouble Questions.
7. Weeks 7-8: two timed Mock Exams (BCEN's practice exam is optional), read every rationale, rest the last 2 days.

5 Test-day tips

- Arrive (test center) or log in (remote) 30 minutes early; expect a photo, and wanding at test centers
- Remote: personal computer only (employer laptops often fail); run PSI's system check and tutorial 3+ days ahead
- ID: unexpired government photo ID with signature, such as a passport, driver's license or state ID (not a military ID)
- Testing outside your home country: bring your passport
- Your first and last name must match your registration exactly
- Up to 2 breaks of 10 minutes or less; the clock keeps running
- Scratch paper: 2 sheets (given at test centers, your own blank sheets remotely), destroyed at the end

SAFETY A break over 10 minutes ends your exam. A no-show, late arrival or wrong ID can cost the full fee. To keep your fee, reschedule more than 24 hours ahead and inside your window.

6 Official resources

- Candidate Handbook, Content Outline (July 2026), Resource List and Preparation Checklist (2026)
- BCEN Learn CEN Practice Exam: timed, untimed and Quick 10 modes
- CEN Sample Questions (10) and Review Course ($250, 21 CE)

Selected titles; BCEN endorses no resource. Newer editions exist: AHA ACLS and PALS manuals (2025) and ATLS 11th edition.

TITLE (BCEN 2026 LIST)	EDITION
Emergency Nursing Core Curriculum (ENA)	8th (2026)
Emergency Severity Index Handbook	5th (2023)
TNCC Provider Manual	9th (2023)
ENPC Provider Manual	6th (2023)
ACLS and PALS Provider Manuals (AHA)	2020
ATLS Student Course Manual (ACS)	10th (2018)

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