

Emergency Services: EMT & Paramedic

What EMTs and Paramedics Do EMTs and paramedics use special equipment, including backboards and restraints, to immobilize patients and secure them in the ambulance for transport. Emergency medical technicians (EMTs) and paramedics care for the sick or injured in emergency medical settings. People's lives often depend on their quick reaction and competent care. EMTs and paramedics respond to emergency calls, performing medical services and transporting patients to medical facilities.

A 911 operator sends EMTs and paramedics to the scene of an emergency, where they often work with police and firefighters.

Duties

- Respond to 911 calls for emergency medical assistance, such as cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) or bandaging a wound
- Assess a patient's condition and determine a course of treatment
- Follow guidelines that they learned in training and that they receive from physicians who oversee their work
- Use backboards and restraints to keep patients still and safe in an ambulance for transport
- Help transfer patients to the emergency department of a healthcare facility and report their observations and treatment to the staff
- Create a patient care report; documenting the medical care they gave the patient
- Replace used supplies and check or clean equipment after use

When taking a patient to the hospital, one EMT or paramedic may drive the ambulance while another monitors the patient's vital signs and gives additional care. Some paramedics work as part of a helicopter's flight crew to transport critically ill or injured patients to a hospital.

EMTs and paramedics also take patients from one medical facility to another. Some patients may need to be transferred to a hospital that specializes in treating their injury or illness or to a facility that provides long-term care, such as a nursing home.

If a patient has a contagious disease, EMTs and paramedics decontaminate the interior of the ambulance and may need to report these cases to the proper authorities.

The specific responsibilities of EMTs and paramedics depend on their level of training and the state they work in. The National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians (NREMT) provides national certification of EMTs and paramedics at four levels: EMT-Basic, EMT-

Intermediate (which has two levels, respectively called 1985 and 1999), and Paramedic. Some states, however, have their own certification programs and use different titles.

An *EMT-Basic*, also known as an EMT, cares for patients at the scene and while taking patients by ambulance to a hospital. An EMT-Basic has the emergency skills to assess a patient's condition and manage respiratory, cardiac, and trauma emergencies.

An *EMT-Intermediate (1985 or 1999)*, also known as Advanced EMT, has completed the training required at the EMT-Basic level, as well as training for more advanced skills, such as the use of intravenous fluids and some medications.

Paramedics provide more extensive pre-hospital care than do EMTs. In addition to carrying out the procedures that EMTs use, paramedics can give medications orally and intravenously, interpret electrocardiograms (EKGs)—used to monitor heart function—and use other monitors and complex equipment.

The specific tasks or procedures EMTs and paramedics are allowed to perform at any level vary by state.

Work Environment EMTs and paramedics care for sick or injured patients in a pre-hospital setting. EMTs and paramedics work both indoors and outdoors, in all types of weather. Their work is physically strenuous and can be stressful, sometimes involving life-or-death situations and patients who are suffering. Most career EMTs and paramedics work in metropolitan areas. Volunteer EMTs and paramedics are more common in small cities, towns, and rural areas. These individuals volunteer for fire departments, providers of emergency medical services, or hospitals and may respond to only a few calls per month.

- Ambulance services 48%
- Local government 29%
- Hospitals 17%

Injuries EMTs and paramedics experience a much larger than average number of work-related injuries or illnesses. They are required to do considerable kneeling, bending, and lifting while caring for and moving patients. They may be exposed to contagious diseases, such as hepatitis B and AIDS. Sometimes they can be injured by mentally unstable or combative patients. These risks can be reduced by following proper safety procedures, such as waiting for police to clear an area in violent situations or wearing gloves while working with a patient.

Work Schedules Most EMTs and paramedics work full time. About one-third worked more than full time in 2010. Because EMTs and paramedics must be available to work in emergencies, they may work overnight and on weekends. Some EMTs and paramedics are volunteers and have varied work schedules.

Education and Training Both a high school diploma or equivalent and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) certification are prerequisites for most formal education and training programs. High school students interested in entering these occupations should take courses in anatomy and physiology. Formal training is offered by technical institutes, community colleges, and facilities that specialize in emergency care training.

At the *EMT-Basic* level, training includes instruction in assessing patients' conditions, dealing with trauma and cardiac emergencies, clearing obstructed airways, using field equipment, and handling emergencies. Formal courses include about 100 hours of specialized training. Some training may be required in a hospital or ambulance setting.

The *EMT-Intermediate 1985* or *EMT-Intermediate 1999* level, also known as the *Advanced EMT* level, typically requires 1,000 hours of training based on the scope of practice. At this level, people must complete the training required at the EMT level, as well as more advanced training, such as training in the use of complex airway devices, intravenous fluids, and some medications.

Paramedics have the most advanced level of training. They must complete EMT-level and Advanced EMT training, as well as training in advanced medical skills. Community colleges and technical schools may offer this training, in which graduates may receive an associate's degree. Paramedic programs require about 1,300 hours of training and may take up to 2 years. Their broader scope of practice may include stitching wounds or administering IV medications.

Separate training and licensure is required to drive an ambulance. Although some emergency medical services hire separate drivers, most EMTs and paramedics take a course requiring about 8 hours of training before they can drive an ambulance.

Licenses and Certification The National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians (NREMT) certifies EMTs and paramedics. All levels of NREMT certification require completing a certified training or education program and passing the national exam. The national exam has both a written part and a practical part.

All states require EMTs and paramedics to be licensed; requirements vary by state. In most states, an individual who has NREMT certification qualifies for licensure; in some, passing an equivalent state exam is required. Typically to apply for a license, an applicant must be over the age of 18. Many states require background checks and may decide not to give a license to an applicant who has a criminal history.

Important Qualities

Compassion. EMTs and paramedics must provide emotional support to patients in an emergency, especially patients who are in life-threatening situations or extreme mental distress.

Interpersonal skills. EMTs and paramedics almost always work on teams and must be able to coordinate their activities closely with others in stressful situations.

Listening skills. EMTs and paramedics need to listen to patients to determine the extent of their injuries or illnesses.

Physical strength. EMTs and paramedics need to be physically fit. Their job requires a lot of bending, lifting, and kneeling.

Problem-solving skills. EMTs and paramedics need strong problem-solving skills. They must evaluate patients' symptoms and administer the appropriate treatments.

Speaking skills. EMTs and paramedics need to be able to comfort and explain procedures to the patient, give orders, and relay information to others.

Pay Median annual wages, May 2010: **\$39,000**

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Job Outlook Percent change in employment, projected 2010-20: **33% growth**

Emergencies such as car crashes, natural disasters, and violence will continue to create demand for EMTs and paramedics. Growth in the middle-aged and elderly population will lead to an increase in the number of age-related health emergencies, such as heart attacks or strokes. This, in turn, will lead to an increase in the demand for EMTs and paramedic services. An increase in specialized medical facilities will require more EMTs and paramedics to transfer patients with specific conditions to these facilities for treatment.

In recent years, companies that build ambulances have started to update and redesign their interiors to keep EMTs, paramedics, and patients safer during transport. These companies are hiring EMTs and paramedics as consultants to learn their ideas about such updates and designs.

SOURCE:

Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2012-13 Edition*, EMTs and Paramedics, on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/emts-and-paramedics.htm> (visited August 10, 2012).

Local Training:

Inspira Health Network

Millville Rescue Squad

Cumberland Co TEC

Gloucester Co College

Salem Co Voc. Tech