

Emergency Medical Technicians and Paramedics

Professional Activities

People's lives often depend on the quick reaction and competent care of emergency medical technicians (EMTs) and paramedics. Incidents as varied as automobile accidents, heart attacks, slips and falls, childbirth, and gunshot wounds require immediate medical attention. EMTs and paramedics provide this vital service as they care for and transport the sick or injured to a medical facility.

EMTs and paramedics typically are dispatched to the scene by a 911 operator and often work with police and fire department personnel. Once they arrive, they determine the nature and extent of the patient's condition while trying to ascertain whether the patient has preexisting medical problems. Following strict rules and guidelines, they give appropriate emergency care and, when necessary, transport the patient.

At the medical facility, EMTs and paramedics help transfer patients to the emergency department, report their observations and actions to staff, and may provide additional emergency treatment. After each run, EMTs and paramedics replace used supplies and check equipment. If a transported patient had a contagious disease, EMTs and paramedics decontaminate the interior of the ambulance and report cases to the proper authorities.

Beyond these general duties, the specific responsibilities of EMTs and paramedics depend on their level of qualification and training. To determine this, the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians (NREMT) registers emergency medical service (EMS) providers at four levels: First Responder, EMT-Basic, EMT-Intermediate, and EMT-Paramedic. Some states, however, do their own certification and use numeric ratings from 1 to 4 to distinguish levels of proficiency.

EMTs and paramedics work both indoors and outdoors, in all types of weather. They are required to do considerable kneeling, bending, and heavy lifting. These workers risk noise-induced hearing loss from sirens and back injuries from lifting patients. In addition, EMTs and paramedics may be exposed to diseases such as Hepatitis-B and AIDS, as well as violence from drug overdose victims or mentally unstable patients. The work is not only physically strenuous, but also stressful, involving life-or-death situations and suffering patients. Nonetheless, many people find the work exciting and challenging and enjoy the opportunity to help others.

EMTs and paramedics employed by fire departments work about 50 hours a week. Those employed by hospitals frequently work between 45 and 60 hours a week, and those in private ambulance services, between 45 and 50 hours. Some of these workers, especially those in police and fire departments, are on call for extended periods. Because emergency services function 24 hours a day, EMTs and paramedics have irregular working hours that add to job stress.

EMTs and paramedics should be emotionally stable, have good dexterity, agility, and physical coordination, and be able to lift and carry heavy loads. They also need good eyesight (corrective lenses may be used) with accurate color vision.

Educational Requirements

A high school diploma is usually required to enter a formal emergency medical technician training program. Training is offered at progressive levels: EMT-Basic, EMT-Intermediate, and Paramedic.

At the EMT-Basic level, coursework emphasizes emergency skills, such as managing respiratory, trauma, and cardiac emergencies, and patient assessment. Formal courses are often combined with time in an emergency department or ambulance. The program provides instruction and practice in dealing with bleeding, fractures, airway obstruction, cardiac arrest, and emergency childbirth. Students learn how to use and maintain common emergency equipment, such as backboards, suction devices, splints, oxygen delivery systems, and stretchers. Graduates of approved EMT-Basic training programs must pass a written and practical examination administered by the State licensing agency or the NREMT.

At the EMT-Intermediate level, training requirements vary by State. The nationally defined levels, EMT-Intermediate 1985 and EMT-Intermediate 1999, typically require 30 to 350 hours of training based on scope of practice. Students learn advanced skills such the use of advanced airway devices, intravenous fluids, and some medications.

The most advanced level of training for this occupation is Paramedic. At this level, the caregiver receives training in anatomy and physiology as well as advanced medical skills. Most commonly, the training is conducted in community colleges and technical schools and may result in an associate's degree. These programs may take up to one to two years. Such education prepares the graduate to take the NREMT examination to become certified as a Paramedic. Extensive related coursework and clinical and field experience is required. Refresher courses and continuing education are available for EMTs and paramedics at all levels.

All 50 States require EMTs and Paramedics to be licensed, but the levels and titles vary from State to State. In most States and the District of Columbia certification by the NREMT is required at some or all levels. Some States administer their own certification examination or provide the option of taking either the NREMT or State examination. In most States, licensure renewal is required every two to three years and generally, EMTs and Paramedics must take refresher training courses or complete continuing education requirements.

Academic Programs

[College of DuPage](#)

[College of Lake County](#)

[Elgin Community College](#)

[Frontier Community College](#)

[Harper College](#)

[Heartland Community College](#)

[Illinois Central College](#)

[John A. Logan College](#)

[John Wood Community College](#)

[Joliet Junior College](#)

[Kankakee Community College](#)

[Kaskaskia College](#)

[Kishwaukee College](#)

[Lake Land College](#)

[Lewis & Clark Community College](#)

[Lincoln Land Community College](#)

[Malcom X College](#)

[McHenry County College](#)

[Moraine Valley Community College](#)

[Oakton Community College](#)

[Parkland College](#)

[Prairie State College](#)

[Rend Lake College](#)

[Richland Community College](#)

[South Suburban College](#)

[Southwestern Illinois College](#)

[Triton College](#)

[Waubonsee Community College](#)

Employment/Salary Outlook

Growth in this occupation is due in large part to increasing call volume due to aging population. As a large segment of the population—aging members of the baby boom generation—becomes more likely to have medical emergencies, demand will increase for EMTs and paramedics. In addition, the time that EMTs and paramedics must spend with each patient is increasing as emergency departments across the country are experiencing overcrowding. As a result, when an ambulance arrives, it takes longer to transfer the patient from the care of the EMTs and paramedics to the staff of the emergency department.

Competition will be greater for jobs in local government, including fire, police, and independent third-service rescue squad departments that tend to have better salaries and benefits. EMTs and paramedics who have advanced education and certifications should enjoy the most favorable job prospects, as clients and patients demand higher levels of care before arriving at the hospital.

State and National Wages

| Location | Pay Period | 2021 | | |
|---------------|------------|----------|----------|----------|
| | | Low | Median | High |
| United States | Hourly | \$11.36 | \$17.05 | \$22.88 |
| | Annual | \$23,620 | \$36,070 | \$47,580 |
| Illinois | Hourly | \$11.22 | \$17.34 | \$47.24 |
| | Annual | \$23,340 | \$36,070 | \$98,270 |

State and National Trends

| United States | Employment | | Percent Change | Job Openings ¹ |
|--|------------|---------|----------------|---|
| | 2020 | 2030 | | |
| Emergency Medical Technicians and Paramedics | 261,300 | 289,900 | 11% | 20,700 |
| Illinois | Employment | | Percent Change | Job Openings ¹ |
| | 2018 | 2028 | | |
| Emergency Medical Technicians and Paramedics | 11,090 | 11,710 | 6% | 820 |

¹Job Openings refers to the average annual job openings due to growth and net replacement.

Professional Organizations

National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians (nremt.org)

National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians (naemt.org)

References

Occupational Outlook Handbook, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics
(<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/emts-and-paramedics.htm>)

O*NET OnLine (<http://online.onetcenter.org/link/summary/29-2041.00>)

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