



## EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES – EMT & PARAMEDIC

**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

EMTs and paramedics typically do the following:

- 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 learned in training or received from physicians who oversee their work
- Use backboards and restraints to keep patients still and safe in an ambulance during 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 given to the patient
- Replace used supplies and check or clean equipment after use

When taking a patient to a 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 transport 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 the case to the proper authorities. The specific responsibilities of EMTs and paramedics depend on whether they are an EMT or EMT-Basic, Advanced EMT, or paramedic; and the state they work in. The [National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians](#) (NREMT) provides national certification of EMTs and paramedics at three levels: EMT/Basic, Advanced EMT or EMT-Intermediate, and Paramedic. Some states, however, have their own certification programs and use different titles.

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

An **Advanced EMT**, also known as an **EMT-Intermediate**, has completed the requirements for the EMT level, as well as instruction in more advanced medical procedures, such as administering intravenous fluids and some medications.

**Paramedics** provide more extensive prehospital care than do EMTs. In addition to being able to carry out the tasks of EMTs, 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. Information specific to the state of Virginia can be found on the Virginia Department of Health website: [http://www.vdh.state.va.us/OEMS/Training/tprog.htm#Emergency Medical Technician – Paramedic](http://www.vdh.state.va.us/OEMS/Training/tprog.htm#Emergency%20Medical%20Technician%20%E2%80%93%20Paramedic)

## IMPORTANT QUALITIES

- **Compassion.** EMTs and paramedics must be able to 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 usually 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 be able to evaluate patients' symptoms and administer the appropriate treatments.
- **Speaking skills.** EMTs and paramedics need to be able explain procedures to patients, give orders, and relay information to others.

## HOW TO BECOME AN EMT OR PARAMEDIC

Emergency medical technicians (EMTs) and paramedics must complete a postsecondary educational program. All states require EMTs and paramedics to be licensed; requirements vary by state.

Both a high school diploma or equivalent and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) certification are prerequisites for most postsecondary educational programs in **emergency medical technology**. Most of these programs are postsecondary non-degree award programs that can be completed in less than 1 year; others last up to 2 years. **Paramedics**, however, may need an associate's degree. Educational programs in emergency medical technology are offered by technical institutes, community colleges, and facilities that specialize in emergency care training. High school students interested in becoming EMTs or paramedics should take courses in anatomy and physiology.

Programs at the EMT level include instruction in assessing patients' conditions, dealing with trauma and cardiac emergencies, clearing obstructed airways, using field equipment, and handling emergencies. Formal courses include about 150 hours of specialized instruction, and some instruction may take place in a hospital or ambulance setting.

Programs at the Advanced EMT level typically requires about 300 hours of instruction based on the scope of practice. At this level, people must complete the requirements for the EMT level as well as more advanced ones, such as using complex airway devices, intravenous fluids, and some medications.

Paramedics have the most advanced level of education. They must complete EMT and Advanced EMT levels of instruction, along with courses in advanced medical skills. Community colleges and technical schools may offer these programs, which require about 1,200 hours of instruction and may lead to an associate's degree. Paramedics' broader scope of practice may include stitching wounds or administering intravenous medications.

## LICENSURE/CERTIFICATION

The [National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians](#) (NREMT) certifies EMTs and paramedics. All levels of NREMT certification require completing a certified education program and passing the national exam. The national exam has both written and practical parts.

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 others, passing an equivalent state exam is required. Usually an applicant must be over the age of 18. Many states require background checks and may not give a license to an applicant who has a criminal history.

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

## WORKING CONDITIONS

**Emergency medical technicians (EMTs)** and **paramedics** held about 248,000 jobs in 2016. They 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 paid 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.

The industries that employed the most paid EMTs and paramedics in 2017 were as follows

Ambulance services	48%
Government	28%
Hospitals	18%

## **JOB OUTLOOK**

Employment of emergency medical technicians (EMTs) and paramedics is projected to grow 15 percent from 2016 to 2026, much faster than the average for all occupations. Emergencies, such as car crashes, natural disasters, or acts of violence, will continue to create demand for EMTs and paramedics. Demand for part-time, volunteer EMTs and paramedics in rural areas and smaller metropolitan areas will also continue.

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 create greater demand for EMTs and paramedic services. An increase in the number of specialized medical facilities will require more EMTs and paramedics to transfer patients with specific conditions to these facilities for treatment.

## **AVERAGE SALARY**

The median annual wage for emergency medical technicians (EMTs) and paramedics was \$33,380 in May 2017. The median wage is the wage at which half the workers in an occupation earned more than that amount and half earned less. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$21,180, and the top 10 percent earned more than \$56,990.

Most paid EMTs and paramedics work full time. About 1 in 3 worked more than 40 hours per week in 2012. Because EMTs and paramedics must be available to work in emergencies, they may work overnight and on weekends. Some EMTs and paramedics work shifts in 12- or 24-hour increments. Volunteer EMTs and paramedics have variable work schedules.

## **RELATED WEBSITES**

### **National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians**

<http://www.naemt.org/>

### **Virginia Department of Health office of Emergency Medical Services**

[www.vdh.state.va.us/OEMS/Training/tprog.htm#Emergency Medical Technician – Paramedic](http://www.vdh.state.va.us/OEMS/Training/tprog.htm#Emergency%20Medical%20Technician%20%E2%80%93%20Paramedic)

### **National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians**

<https://www.nremt.org/>

### **U.S. Department of Labor**

<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/ems-and-paramedics.htm>