

How to Become a Paramedic/EMT: Paramedic Schools and EMT Training



Becoming an emergency medical technician (EMT) or paramedic typically takes one to three years, depending on your career goals and educational path. EMT training focuses on life support techniques for first-response situations, including CPR, tourniquet application, and wound treatment. Paramedics perform more advanced procedures than EMTs and therefore require more extensive education and training.

This guide reviews the basic responsibilities of EMTs and paramedics and highlights the educational steps needed to enter the field.

What Does a Paramedic/EMT Do?

Paramedics and EMTs work in a variety of capacities, including providing immediate medical treatment for sick and injured people in emergency situations and transporting patients to medical facilities.

Emergency medical technicians respond to 911 calls and medical emergencies. EMTs transport patients to hospitals, perform basic medical tasks, and act as first responders. As a medical professional, you must work well under pressure to make life-saving decisions in high-stress environments.

EMTs work closely with other medical professionals, including:

- Paramedics
- Police
- Firefighters

Your responsibilities as an EMT depend on your education and training. Some first responders only administer basic care, while EMTs with more training can perform more complex medical procedures in the field and on the way to the hospital.

What's the Difference Between an EMT and Paramedic?

Emergency Medical Technician (EMT)

- EMTs provide basic medical care to patients in the field, including stopping external bleeding, applying neck braces, and administering CPR.
- Many EMTs work for ambulance services, hospitals, and fire and police departments.
- EMTs must complete 120 to 150 hours of training to obtain certification.
- EMTs take the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians (NREMT) exam.
- Most EMT training programs do not award a degree.

Paramedic

- Paramedics provide advanced medical care to patients in the field, including administering medication, inserting IVs, resuscitating patients, and providing breathing support using tubes and ventilation devices.
- In addition to working for employers that hire EMTs, paramedics can work in air ambulances and for other advanced emergency services.
- Paramedics must complete 1,200 to 1,800 hours of training to qualify for certification.
- Paramedics take the NREMT and the National Registry Paramedic cognitive exam.
- Some paramedic training programs offer a two-year degree.

How to Become a Paramedic/EMT

To become an EMT, you'll need a high school diploma or GED credential. EMTs must earn CPR certification before enrolling in a postsecondary emergency medical technology program. These programs last 1-2 years and do not confer degrees. Paramedics must complete additional training, which may require an associate degree in emergency care training.

Step 1

Complete EMT Basic Training

Both EMTs and paramedics must obtain CPR certification. Organizations such as the American Red Cross and the American Heart Association regularly provide CPR training.

EMTs and paramedics must also complete a postsecondary emergency medical technology program through a community college, technical college, or university. These programs last 1-2 years and teach students how to assess, care for, and transport patients.

Aspiring paramedics then pursue a two-year associate degree in emergency medical services. These programs prepare learners to administer medications, insert IVs, and resuscitate patients.

Step 2

Pass a State Exam to Become Certified

EMTs and paramedics both need state certification to practice. New York State requires a state-specific certification exam. To sit for the exam, you must have completed a state-approved training course within the last two years.

In addition to the NYS certification exam, there is the national registry exam and is optional. The NREMT comprises a cognitive test and a psychomotor portion. You'll have six attempts to pass the cognitive exam and can reapply to take the cognitive exam 15 days after receiving your results. You'll take the psychomotor exam through a state emergency services office or approved training site.

Paramedics may also take the National Registered Paramedics exam (Optional).

Step 3

Complete Advanced EMT Training (Optional)

Some EMTs complete additional training. These advanced courses do not qualify EMTs to become paramedics. However, they do prepare EMTs for the Advanced EMT exam from the NREMT.

Advanced training courses require about 150 to 200 hours of fieldwork. Many courses require internship rotations in an emergency room and an emergency services agency.

Step 4

Complete a Two-Year Degree Program (Optional)

Community colleges, technical institutes, and universities offer associate degree programs in emergency care training. Associate programs in the field typically cover physiology, advanced life-support techniques, and anatomy. While many states require paramedics to earn a degree, this step is optional for EMTs.

What Paramedic/EMT Training Is Available?

An EMT diploma or certificate is the starting point of education for those who aspire to enter the field. If you wish to build your knowledge and skills further, you can earn an associate's or bachelor's degree.

Diploma or Certificate

The emergency medical technician certificate program will equip you with the foundational skills needed to provide emergency medical care to patients en route to a hospital.

You'll learn basic life support procedures to help patients in various emergency situations, including those who are suffering from an illness, have been the victim of violence, or have gotten into an accident. In order to deliver this critical care, students in paramedic schools are taught skills such as cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and how to open a patient's airway.

The EMT certificate program typically takes one to two years to complete, and prepares students to pass the licensing examination in their state. Examples of common courses and skills gained are given below.

Fundamentals of Emergency Medical Technology

Provides an overview of basic life support techniques in an emergency care setting.

Skills and Knowledge Gained:

- Stabilizing patient after an emergency or illness
- Managing patient airways
- Bandaging patients
- Assessing what kind of care patients need

EMT Assessment

Teaches aspiring EMTs how to assess the condition of a patient and make treatment decisions.

Skills and Knowledge Gained:

- Getting a patient's history
- Making primary and secondary patient assessments

Introduction to the EMT Profession

Familiarizes students with how to work in the EMT care environment.

Skills and Knowledge Gained:

- Documenting patient treatment
- Understanding medical terminology
- Communicating in a therapeutic environment
- Managing a medical incident

Airway Management

Introduces students to the procedures for opening and managing a patient's airway.

Skills and Knowledge Gained:

- Using devices related to airway management
- Monitoring medical equipment
- Understanding artificial ventilation devices

Associate Degrees

After earning an EMT certification, many students enroll in a paramedic associate degree program to advance their careers. Paramedics have more patient care responsibilities than EMTs, so the training received at this level is more comprehensive and advanced than a certificate.

Building on students' previous experience, this degree provides instruction on advanced emergency care techniques, including cardiac care, patient stabilization, and airway treatments. To help students deepen their understanding of emergency medical care, associate degree programs commonly offer the following courses:

Trauma Management

Covers the steps involved with treating trauma patients.

Skills and Knowledge Gained:

- Making patient assessments
- Understanding care for different kinds of trauma, such as spinal and soft-tissue trauma
- Caring for burns
- Implementing a treatment plan

Special Populations

Provides an understanding of how to treat patients requiring special or extra care.

Skills and Knowledge Gained:

- Understanding pediatric emergencies
- Assessing the needs of patients with psychiatric emergencies
- Treating elderly patients

Emergency Pharmacology

Explains the use of medications during emergency care.

Skills and Knowledge Gained:

- Understanding pharmacological terminology
- Considering drug side effects when administering medications
- Administering drugs commonly used in emergency care

Cardiology

Describes the treatment of cardiac emergencies.

Skills and Knowledge Gained:

- Understanding cardiovascular emergencies
- Making an assessment of a cardiac patient
- Implementing a cardiac treatment plan

Bachelor's Degrees

Paramedics who wish to advance their careers may elect to enroll in a four-year bachelor's degree program. Bachelor's degree graduates often procure jobs as healthcare administrators, paramedic training managers, or clinical supervisors. Some students use this degree as a springboard to go even

further in their education, enrolling in physician assistant programs or medical school. Students can expect to gain a number of valuable skills throughout their degree, including:

Leadership

Students who aspire to supervisory roles in an emergency care setting learn how to manage the work of paramedics as they navigate their way through chaotic situations.

Advanced clinical knowledge

Students build on existing knowledge of emergency care, gaining a deeper understanding of how to effectively work in an emergency environment through planning and executing patient care strategies.

Administrative skills

Taking a managerial role in the field includes completing administrative tasks. Students learn various managerial functions, including budgeting, staffing, completing employee evaluations, and organizational planning.

Online Paramedic/EMT Training

Online paramedic schools are a convenient option for students who want to receive EMT training that can easily fit into their schedules. These programs allow students to combine online classes with in-person training, providing both theoretical and hands-on education. This is an attractive choice for many, but to get the most out of your education, you must find a school matched to your unique needs. Some characteristics to look for when choosing a school include:

Paramedics work with patients in high-pressure environments where their actions could mean the difference between life and death. They need specialized training from reputable institutions to ensure they get the best education and preparation to obtain their license. The Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) should accredit any school under consideration. This organization guarantees that online paramedic programs provide students with an education that adequately prepares them for the demands of the field.

Students need to be trained on the latest techniques, and part of that includes being knowledgeable about equipment used by paramedics. When looking for a school, students should inquire about the varied types of equipment used during training and confirm that it is in good working order.

The EMT field is extremely demanding, so students should look for schools that have faculty members with significant experience. Finding out how long teachers have worked as paramedics and whether or not they are still practicing can go a long way toward determining if a department offers qualified faculty.

Components of a Successful Career as a Paramedic/EMT

Paramedic Skills

This is a fast-paced career that demands workers have strong critical thinking skills to make snap decisions about how to treat patients. EMTs and paramedics must be excellent communicators: good listening helps them understand what each patient needs, while strong verbal skills allow them to communicate effectively with patients and other healthcare professionals.

Like other medical providers, paramedics and EMTs must show compassion when working with people in physical and emotional distress. Physical strength, stamina, and coordination are imperative for moving patients quickly and treating them with precision.

Paramedic Credentials

In addition to receiving a state license and NREMT certification, EMTs and paramedics who want to drive emergency vehicles must take a separate training course. Though this is not an exhaustive list, the following certifications are available to EMTs and paramedics:

- Certified Healthcare Emergency Professional: International Board for Certification of Safety Managers
- EMT Basic: National Registry of EMTs
- EMT Intermediate: National Registry of EMTs
- EMT Paramedic: National Registry of EMTs
- First Responder: National Registry of EMTs
- Certified Medical Interpreter: The National Board of Certification for Medical Interpreters
- Critical Care Paramedics: Board for Critical Care Transport Paramedic Certification
- Flight Paramedic Certification: Board for Critical Care Transport Paramedic Certification
- Certified Hyperbaric Technologist: National Board of Diving and Hyperbaric Medical Technology

Tools and Technology for Paramedics

Paramedics and EMTs need several tools and technologies in order to treat patients. Some of the technologies they use include medical software like MedDataSolutions Register, and information retrieval software—such as TechOnSoftware HazMatCE Pro, Epocrates software, and HyperTox.

In addition, some of the tools of this trade include airway suction units, portable oxygen equipment, cardboard splints, oxygen masks, laryngoscopes, and intravenous IV pressure infusers.