

Promising Job Outlook for Experienced Emergency Medical Technicians and Paramedics

(The following information is excerpted from US BLS article _____).

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in a recent report, employment rates for Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT's) and Paramedics is projected to grow faster than the average as paid positions replace unpaid volunteers. Opportunities will be best for those who have earned advanced certifications.

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 all 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.

In an emergency, EMTs and paramedics are typically dispatched by a 911 operator to the scene, where they often work with police and fire fighters. Once they arrive, EMTs and paramedics assess the nature of the patient's condition while trying to determine whether the patient has any pre-existing medical conditions. Following medical protocols and guidelines, they provide appropriate emergency care and, when necessary, transport the patient. Some paramedics are trained to treat patients with minor injuries on the scene of an accident or they may treat them at their home without transporting them to a medical facility. Emergency treatment is carried out under the medical direction of physicians.

EMTs and paramedics may use special equipment, such as backboards, to immobilize patients before placing them on stretchers and securing them in the ambulance for transport to a medical facility. These workers generally work in teams. During the transport of a patient, one EMT or paramedic drives while the other monitors the patient's vital signs and gives additional care as needed. Some paramedics work as part of a helicopter's flight crew to transport critically ill or injured patients to hospital trauma centers.

At the medical facility, EMTs and paramedics help transfer patients to the emergency department, report their observations and actions to emergency department 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.

EMTs and paramedics also provide transportation for patients from one medical facility to another, particularly if they work for private ambulance services. Patients often need to be transferred to a hospital that specializes in their injury or illness or to a nursing home.

Beyond these general duties, the specific responsibilities of EMTs and paramedics depend on their level of qualification and

training. The National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians (NREMT) certifies emergency medical service providers at five levels: First Responder; EMT-Basic; EMT-Intermediate, which has two levels called 1985 and 1999; and Paramedic. Some States, however, have their own certification programs and use distinct names and titles.

The EMT-Basic represents the first component of the emergency medical technician system. An EMT trained at this level is prepared to care for patients at the scene of an accident and while transporting patients by ambulance to the hospital under medical direction. The EMT-Basic has the emergency skills to assess a patient's condition and manage respiratory, cardiac, and trauma emergencies.

The EMT-Intermediate has more advanced training. However, the specific tasks that those certified at this level are allowed to perform varies greatly from by State.

EMT-Paramedics provide the most extensive pre-hospital care. In addition to carrying out the procedures of the other levels, paramedics may administer drugs orally and intravenously, interpret electrocardiograms (EKGs), perform endotracheal intubations, and use monitors and other complex equipment. However, like EMT-Immediate, what Paramedics are permitted to do varies from State to State.

The work environment of EMTs and paramedics requires that these individuals work both indoors and out, 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 mentally unstable patients. The work is not only physically strenuous but can be stressful, sometimes 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 EMTs and paramedics often work in pairs, where one person drives the ambulance and the other monitors the patient.

EMTs and Paramedics, especially those in police and fire departments, are often on call for extended periods. Because emergency services function 24 hours a day, EMTs and paramedics have irregular working hours.

Generally, a high school diploma is required to enter a training program to become an EMT or paramedic. Workers must complete

a formal training and certification process. Training is offered at progressive levels: EMT-Basic, EMT-Intermediate, and EMT-Paramedic. All 50 States require certification for each of the EMT levels.

There is considerable room for advancement. Paramedics can become supervisors, operations managers, administrative directors, or executive directors of emergency services. Some EMTs and paramedics become instructors, dispatchers, or physician assistants; others move into sales or marketing of emergency medical equipment. A number of people become EMTs and paramedics to test their interest in health care before training as registered nurses, physicians, or other health workers.

Employment for EMTs and paramedics is expected to grow by 19 percent between 2006 and 2016, faster than the average for all occupations. Job prospects should be good, particularly in cities and private ambulance services. Full-time paid EMTs and paramedics will be needed to replace unpaid volunteers. It is becoming increasingly difficult for emergency medical services to recruit and retain unpaid volunteers because of the amount of training and the large time commitment these positions require. As a result, more paid EMTs and paramedics are needed. Furthermore, 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. There also will still be demand for part-time, volunteer EMTs and paramedics in rural areas and smaller metropolitan areas.

Earnings of EMTs and paramedics depend on the employment setting and geographic location of their jobs, as well as their training and experience. Median annual earnings of EMTs and paramedics were \$27,070 in May 2006. The middle 50 percent earned between \$21,290 and \$35,210. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$17,300, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$45,280. Median annual earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of EMTs and paramedics in May 2006 were \$23,250 in general medical and surgical hospitals and \$20,350 in ambulance services. Those in emergency medical services who are part of fire or police departments typically receive the same benefits as firefighters or police officers. For example, many are covered by pension plans that provide retirement at half pay after 20 or 25 years of service or if the worker is disabled in the line of duty.

Other sources of general information about emergency medical technicians and paramedics include:

National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians,
P.O. Box 1400, Clinton, MS 39060-1400.
Internet: <http://www.naemt.org>

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, EMS
Division, 400 7th St.SW., NTS-14, Washington, DC 20590.
Internet: <http://www.ems.gov>

National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians,
Rocco V. Morando Bldg., 6610 Busch Blvd., P.O. Box 29233,
Columbus, OH 43229. Internet: <http://www.nremt.org>