

HOW TO BECOME A PARAMEDIC

Peoples' lives often depend on the quick reaction and competent care of Paramedics. Incidents as varied as automobile accidents, heart attacks, drownings, childbirth, and gunshot wounds all require immediate medical attention. Paramedics provide the vital attention as they care for and transport the sick and injured to a medical facility.

In an emergency, Paramedics are typically 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 a 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 patients.

Some paramedics are trained to treat patients with minor injuries on the scene of an accident or at their home without transporting to a medical facility. Emergency treatment for more complicated problems is carried out under the direction of medical doctors by radio, preceding or during transport.

Paramedics provide the most extensive pre-hospital care. In addition to carrying out the procedures described above, paramedics may administer drugs orally or intravenously, interpret electro cardiograms (EKGs), perform endotracheal intubulations, and use monitors and other complex equipment.

Working conditions: Paramedics work both indoors and outdoors in all types of weather. They are required to do considerable kneeling, bending, and heavy lifting. Many people find the work of an EMT exciting and challenging and enjoy the opportunity to help others. Paramedics employed by fire departments work 40-50 hours per week; those employed by hospitals frequently work between 40-60 hours per week; and those employed by private ambulance services work between 45-50 hours per week.

Paramedics held about 265,000 jobs in 2004. Most career Paramedics work in metropolitan areas; there are many more EMTs and Paramedics especially in smaller cities, towns, and rural areas.

Training and other qualifications and advancement: At the Paramedic level, the caregiver gives additional training in body function and learns more advanced skills than an EMT. Education for a Paramedic requires the individual to graduate from a school and take the National Registry EMT Examination to become a certified EMT/Paramedic. Extensive related coursework and clinical and field experience is required. Due to the longer training requirement, almost EMT/Paramedics are in paid positions rather than being volunteers. Refresher courses and continuing education are available for Paramedics at all levels.

Job Opportunities: Employment for Paramedics is expected to grow faster than the average of all other occupations through 2012. Population growth and urbanization will increase the demand for full-time paid Paramedics, rather than for volunteers. In addition, a large segment of the population – the aging baby boomers – will further spur the demand for Paramedic services as they become more likely to have medical emergencies.

Where can you find training to become a Paramedic? Almost all community colleges and some state colleges and hospitals offer training and certification for Paramedics. This training usually consists of between 750-1,500 hours of classroom and field instruction. Reaching this level will require a lot of sacrifice and studying on your part, but becoming a Paramedic will increase your chances of becoming a firefighter.

Approximately 10-20% of all fire departments across the country now require their fire applicants to become Paramedics even before they take the examination. Remember – you must first become an EMT before you can go on to become a Paramedic.

For those of you who are in the process of becoming a Paramedic and will be taking a certification test, please check our website periodically at the “EMT/Paramedic Review” link. We periodically update our examination questions database to help you pass this examination.