

Personal Safety

# Explaining EMS, EMT Professionals, and Ambulance Services

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In emergencies, when individuals need life-saving treatment immediately, there are healthcare heroes who come to the rescue. They may be everyday people, but they pull off extraordinary feats in saving lives. These heroes are called Emergency Medical Technicians or EMTs, and they are often the first point of contact when someone experiences injury or trauma.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) *reports* there are over 265,000 EMTs and paramedics working in the U.S., responding to urgent situations, delivering medical treatment, and rushing people to the hospital.

This article will lay out the differences in emergency services and what it takes to become certified to provide lifesaving care. It will also highlight the hazards these workers face and the safety equipment required to keep them protected.

## EMT vs. EMS

Are EMT and EMS synonyms for the same job? No, there are some key differences. EMS is generally used to refer to all the professionals delivering pre-hospital emergency medical treatment to those who become ill or injured. EMS stands for Emergency Medical Services and is the umbrella term to cover the entire network of emergency medical care service workers, including the dispatchers who take emergency calls and dispatch first responders.

EMS *also* refers to any of the emergency medical services provided to a patient outside of the hospital. That means basic, intermediate, and advanced life support. Simply put, an EMT is part of the entire EMS system.

## What Is an EMT?

The acronym EMT stands for *Emergency Medical Technician*. These emergency responders are the first to arrive at the scene of an accident, which often involves treating seriously injured individuals. In life-threatening situations, people depend on an EMT to quickly assess their injuries and administer appropriate first aid. EMTs are equipped to provide emergency care in pre-hospital settings and during transportation to healthcare facilities. The BLS identifies the following sectors as the largest employers for EMTs:

- **Ambulance Services** – 46%
- **Local Governments** – 28%
- **Hospitals** – 19%

Every situation an EMT responds to is different, and they head into the unknown on every call. One emergency may involve a vehicle crash. The next may involve people injured in a fire; the next an individual with chest pains; the next, a dog bite. Because the injuries, accidents, and illnesses EMTs respond to can vary so widely, the job requires a multitude of skills to care for patients injured in a

myriad of ways.

## Job Description

What does an EMT do? The better question might be to ask what they don't do. Administering oxygen and controlling bleeding are two of the most critical functions EMTs perform. However, there are many more.

According to *O\*NET OnLine*, EMT job responsibilities are likely to include:

- Stabilizing patients on stretchers and backboards
- Evaluating and selecting medical procedures needed
- Providing comfort to patients on their way to the hospital
- Reporting patient observations and vitals to staff upon arrival at the healthcare facility
- Decontaminating ambulances from infectious diseases
- Restocking first aid equipment and supplies on ambulances

EMTs need to have critical thinking skills, communication skills, and physical stamina to perform the tasks associated with the job.

## Certification and Training

How can you become an EMT? A professional emergency caregiver must undergo specific training and must become certified to work in the field.

The National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians certifies individuals at a national level. Here are the four groups certified within the EMS world:

- **Emergency Medical Responders (EMR)** – are *certified* to give immediate lifesaving care after completing a state-approved EMR course. They assist and begin care until other EMS workers arrive on-scene.
- **Basic Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT)** – are the trained professionals who take over for an EMR at accidents. They are certified to provide increased levels of care and are responsible for transporting patients to hospitals. EMTs must complete a *state-approved program* and show competence in the following areas:
  1. Bleeding Control
  2. ~~E~~BVM Ventilation
  3. ~~E~~Cardiac Arrest Management
  4. ~~E~~Joint Immobilization
  5. ~~E~~Oxygen Administration
  6. ~~E~~Patient Trauma Evaluation
  7. ~~E~~Patient Medical Evaluation
  8. ~~E~~**Advanced EMTs** – have completed all EMT requirements and have also completed an *advanced EMT course* to learn how to perform advanced medical care, such as administering fluids.
  9. ~~E~~**Paramedics** – must understand *more complex* medical and lifesaving procedures than EMRs or EMTs. Being a paramedic requires an associate's degree or completion of a Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP)-approved program. We cover the paramedic's role more in our next section.

Overall, the BLS reports that most EMT programs take 1-2 years to complete, depending on the position one is seeking. However, basic EMR and EMT programs can take less time, ranging from *7-9 months*. There is also re-certification required every two years with *continuing education*.

Each school and state will have different prerequisites, so one will need to do some investigative work and verify if the school they're interested in is **credible**.

## Differences Between EMTs and Paramedics

Although EMTs and paramedics each provide emergency medical services to patients, there are some important differences between these two professions. A paramedic's increased training, for example, allows them to provide more advanced care, including complex life support and emergency treatments.

Here are some of the different activities **O\*NET OnLine** shows paramedics performing:

- Administering drugs
- Implementing advanced life support
- Performing manual defibrillation
- Performing invasive intervention

Despite the differences, both paramedics and EMTs serve the vital role of keeping people alive after an accident or injury. And they both face the same hazards while performing their function.

## Job Hazards: CDC and OSHA

Working as an emergency responder involves work that is physically demanding and dangerous. In 2017, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Office of Emergency Medical Services reported **21,000 total injuries** experienced by EMS workers. If you pursue a career as an EMT or paramedic, there are specific job hazards that you should understand.

The **CDC offers guidance** for EMS workers, including EMTs and paramedics. They identify the following as the most significant injury and illness concerns for those working in the EMS field:

- Injuries related to lifting patients and handling emergency equipment
- Treating patients who may have an infectious disease
- Handling hazardous materials, including chemicals and bodily fluids or substances
- Transporting emergency patients via ground or air vehicles

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) also supports EMS workers. Their **guide covers** all the hazards these workers face, along with measures EMS workers can take to keep themselves safe from work-related illnesses and injuries.

Continue reading **this blog** to see the variety of PPE MCR Safety offers EMS workers.

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