

Paramedic

The highest level of pre-hospital care. You make life-and-death calls in somebody's living room at 3am.

TYPICAL PAY

\$60,600

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$44k to \$85k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

1 to 3 years

after high school

DEMAND

Very high

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Ambulances, fire departments, hospitals, air medical crews, even...

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma or an equivalency certificate** Grade 12
Plus a clean background check and usually a driver's license. Some states require you to be 18.
- 2 EMT (emergency medical technician) certification** 3 to 6 months
A course of roughly 150 to 200 hours over a semester, then the national written and skills exams.
- 3 Work on an ambulance** 6 to 12 months
Most paramedic programs want six months to a year of real experience as an EMT first, and it is good advice even where they do not.
- 4 Paramedic program** 12 to 24 months
Roughly 1,200 to 1,800 hours of classroom, hospital clinical rotations and field internship. Offered as a certificate or as an associate degree.
- 5 Certify and get licensed** After the program
Pass the national paramedic exams, then apply to your state's emergency medical services office for the license that actually lets you work.

Pros and cons

- + Qualified and earning within one to three years for very little money
- + Real clinical responsibility from your first shift
- + Rapid growth, and jobs in every county in the country
- The pay is low for the responsibility, especially on private ambulances
- Shift work of 12 or 24 hours wrecks sleep and relationships
- Repeated exposure to trauma, and high rates of burnout and worse

Optional boosts

Firefighter certification. Critical care paramedic. Flight paramedic. Tactical and wilderness medicine.

Good to know

There are four levels, not one

The national registry certifies emergency medical responders, emergency medical technicians, advanced emergency medical technicians and paramedics. Only the top level can intubate, read a t...

The outlook is bright

Federal projections flag this occupation as growing rapidly with plenty of new openings. An aging population and ambulance services that lose staff to burnout both feed the demand.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Paramedics (29-2043.00)

National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians

Committee on Accreditation of Educational Programs for the EMS Professions

Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/paramedic>



Scan for the full clicker