CAREER KIT

# EMT Career Kit: 90-Day Action Plan

*How to Become an EMT (Emergency Medical Technician)*

2026-10 edition

Inside: at-a-glance summary · step-by-step path · costs & requirements · 90-day action plan · documents checklist · exams · interview questions · resume bullets · common mistakes · 13-week tracker · resources

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SECTION 1

# At a glance

To become an EMT (emergency medical technician), you complete a state-approved EMT course, usually one semester or less, then pass a certification exam, most often the National Registry (NREMT) cognitive exam plus a hands-on skills exam, and get licensed by your state EMS office. Courses typically cost about $800–$2,500. Many EMTs later train as paramedics, which takes longer and pays more.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Timeline** | 2–6 months for the EMT course plus testing |
| **Typical cost** | $800–$2,500 for most EMT courses |
| **Education** | High school diploma or GED plus a state-approved EMT course |
| **License** | State EMS license or certification required in every state; most use the NREMT exam |
| **Median pay** | $44,470 per year (EMTs); $48,150 for EMTs and paramedics combined |
| **Job outlook** | +6% (2025–35), faster than average; about 18,200 openings a year |

SECTION 2

# Step-by-step path

### 1. Check your state's EMT rules

*Time: 1 week*

All states require EMTs to be licensed, but requirements vary by state. Most states use National Registry (NREMT) certification as the exam standard, while some also give their own state exam. Look up your state EMS office for the minimum age, approved courses, and background check rules.

### 2. Meet the basic prerequisites

*Time: 1–4 weeks · Cost: $50–$150 for CPR/BLS*

Most courses ask for a high school diploma or GED (or be close to finishing), current CPR/BLS for healthcare providers, immunizations, and a background check. Minimum age varies by state and program. A valid driver's license helps, since most ambulance employers require one.

### 3. Complete a state-approved EMT course

*Time: 6 weeks–6 months · Cost: $800–$2,500*

EMT courses are offered by community colleges, technical schools, fire departments, hospitals, and private EMS academies. You learn patient assessment, airway management, bleeding control, CPR, splinting, emergency childbirth, and how to give a small set of medications under protocol. Many courses offer evening, weekend, or accelerated schedules, and some combine online lectures with in-person skills labs.

### 4. Do your clinical and field time

*Time: Built into the course*

Most courses include supervised shifts in an emergency department and on an ambulance, where you assess real patients. Treat these shifts as a job interview: agencies often hire students they have seen work well.

### 5. Pass the NREMT cognitive exam and a skills exam

*Time: 2–6 weeks of study · Cost: About $100–$110 for the NREMT cognitive exam per attempt*

The National Registry EMT cognitive exam is a computer adaptive test taken at a Pearson VUE center, so the number of questions varies. You also must pass a psychomotor (hands-on skills) exam, which is often handled by your course or state. Some states give their own exam instead of, or in addition to, the NREMT.

### 6. Get your state license and apply for jobs

*Time: 2–8 weeks · Cost: $0–$200 in state license and background check fees*

Apply to your state EMS office with your course completion, exam results, and background check. Then apply to private ambulance companies, fire departments, hospitals, event medical services, and 911 agencies. Some employers also want an emergency vehicle operator course (EVOC).

### 7. Keep your certification and consider paramedic school

*Time: Ongoing; paramedic programs often take 1–2 years*

NREMT certification and state licenses must be renewed on a regular cycle with continuing education. After gaining field experience, many EMTs move up to Advanced EMT or paramedic. Paramedic programs are longer and, for NREMT eligibility, must be accredited through CAAHEP.

SECTION 3

# Costs & requirements

## Estimated costs (USD)

| Item | Low | High | Note |
|---|---|---|---|
| EMT course tuition | $800 | $2,500 | Community colleges and fire academies are often cheapest; typical range, varies by school |
| Textbook, uniform, and equipment | $150 | $500 | Stethoscope, boots, and course uniform |
| CPR/BLS certification | $50 | $150 | |
| Background check, drug screen, and immunizations | $50 | $300 | Varies by program and state |
| NREMT EMT cognitive exam (per attempt) | $100 | $110 | Check nremt.org for the current fee |
| State license or certification fee | $0 | $200 | Varies by state |
| Paramedic program (later step) | $5,000 | $20,000 | Typical range, varies by school |
| **Total** | **$6,150** | **$23,760** | |

## Requirements

| | |
|---|---|
| **Education** | BLS lists a postsecondary nondegree award as the typical entry-level education. In practice that means a state-approved EMT course; most require a high school diploma or GED. |
| **License** | All states require EMTs to be licensed. Requirements vary by state: most require NREMT certification, while others require passing a state exam. |
| **Exams** | The NREMT EMT cognitive exam (computer adaptive) plus a psychomotor skills exam, or your state's equivalent. |
| **Age** | Minimum age varies by state and program. Many require you to be 18 to be licensed. |
| **CPR** | Current healthcare-provider CPR/BLS is required by most courses and for certification. |
| **Background and health** | Expect a criminal background check, immunization records, and sometimes a drug screen. Some convictions can disqualify you in some states. |
| **Driver's license** | BLS notes employers typically require a driver's license, and some prefer ambulance driver training. |
| **Physical ability** | The job involves lifting and carrying patients, kneeling, and working outdoors in all weather. |

SECTION 4

# 90-Day Action Plan

*Tick each box as you finish the task. Do the phases in order; it is fine if a phase takes a little longer.*

## Phase 1: Choose a course and get ready

*Days 1–30*

**Goal:** Enroll in a state-approved EMT course and clear every prerequisite.

- ☐ Look up your state EMS office rules on age, background checks, and approved courses
- ☐ Compare three EMT courses on cost, schedule, pass rates, and clinical sites
- ☐ Ask local fire departments and ambulance companies about paid training or tuition help
- ☐ Get healthcare-provider CPR/BLS certified
- ☐ Gather immunization records and start the background check
- ☐ Enroll and block study time on your calendar

## Phase 2: Learn and practice

*Days 31–60*

**Goal:** Master assessment skills and finish clinical shifts strong.

- ☐ Read each chapter before class and do practice questions weekly
- ☐ Practice patient assessment skill sheets out loud with a classmate
- ☐ Complete ER and ambulance ride-along shifts and log every patient contact
- ☐ Introduce yourself to supervisors at your clinical sites
- ☐ Learn medical terminology and common medication names
- ☐ Start an NREMT-style practice question routine

## Phase 3: Test, license, and get hired

*Days 61–90*

**Goal:** Pass your exams, get licensed, and start working.

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- ☐ Schedule the NREMT cognitive exam soon after finishing the course
- ☐ Pass the psychomotor skills exam
- ☐ Apply for your state EMT license
- ☐ Write a one-page resume focused on clinical shifts and teamwork
- ☐ Apply to 5–10 ambulance, fire, hospital, and event medical jobs per week
- ☐ Practice the interview questions in this kit
- ☐ Research Advanced EMT and paramedic programs for your next step

SECTION 5

# Documents checklist

*Gather these early. Keep originals in one folder and scans in the cloud.*

- [ ] High school diploma or GED
- [ ] Government-issued photo ID and driver's license
- [ ] Healthcare-provider CPR/BLS card
- [ ] Immunization records (and TB test if required)
- [ ] Background check and fingerprint results
- [ ] EMT course completion certificate
- [ ] Clinical and ride-along logs
- [ ] NREMT certification and state license
- [ ] Resume and list of 3 references
- [ ] EVOC or ambulance driver course certificate (if you have one)

SECTION 6

# Exams & how to prepare

## NREMT EMT cognitive exam

**What it is:** Computer adaptive multiple-choice exam covering airway, respiration and ventilation, cardiology and resuscitation, trauma, medical emergencies, OB/GYN, and EMS operations. The number of questions varies because the test adapts to your answers.

**How to prepare:** 2–6 weeks of review using your course textbook, practice question banks, and the NREMT candidate handbook.

## EMT psychomotor (skills) exam

**What it is:** Hands-on testing of patient assessment, bleeding control and shock, airway and ventilation, cardiac arrest management with an AED, and spinal or splinting skills. Format and stations vary by state and program.

**How to prepare:** Practice each skill sheet out loud with a partner until you can do it in order without prompts.

## State EMT exam (some states)

**What it is:** A few states give their own written or practical exam instead of, or in addition to, the NREMT.

**How to prepare:** Ask your state EMS office or course coordinator which exam applies.

SECTION 7

# Interview questions

**1. Why do you want to be an EMT?**

*Tip:* Give a real reason tied to helping people under pressure, not just excitement.

**2. Walk me through your assessment of an unresponsive patient.**

*Tip:* Go step by step: scene safety, responsiveness, airway, breathing, circulation, and calling for help.

**3. How do you handle stress after a difficult call?**

*Tip:* Mention healthy routines, talking with peers, and using support resources.

**4. Tell me about a time you worked as part of a team under pressure.**

*Tip:* Use a specific example and explain your role and the result.

**5. What would you do if a patient refuses care?**

*Tip:* Explain assessing capacity, explaining risks, involving medical control per protocol, and documenting.

**6. How would you deal with an aggressive patient or bystander?**

*Tip:* Show you put scene safety first and use calm communication and law enforcement when needed.

**7. Why is documentation important?**

*Tip:* Mention patient care continuity, legal records, and billing accuracy.

**8. How do you protect patient privacy?**

*Tip:* Mention HIPAA, not sharing details or photos, and secure handling of reports.

**9. Are you comfortable working nights, weekends, and long shifts?**

*Tip:* Be honest and show you understand the schedule realities.

**10. What would you do if your partner made an unsafe decision?**

*Tip:* Say you would speak up right away for patient safety and report it through the right channel.

**11. How do you keep your skills sharp?**

*Tip:* Mention continuing education, practice, and learning from call reviews.

**12. Where do you see yourself in five years?**

*Tip:* Paramedic school, firefighter, or nursing are all good answers if they are honest.

SECTION 8

# Resume bullet examples

*Adapt these to what you actually did. Use numbers wherever you can.*

- Completed a state-approved EMT course with ER and ambulance clinical rotations
- Earned National Registry EMT certification and state EMT license
- Performed patient assessments and vital signs on 30+ patients during field rotations
- Assisted the crew with spinal motion restriction, splinting, and bleeding control
- Delivered CPR and AED care in simulated and supervised cardiac arrest scenarios
- Wrote clear patient care reports reviewed by preceptors
- Maintained current healthcare-provider CPR/BLS certification
- Volunteered as event medical support at community races and festivals

SECTION 9

# Common mistakes to avoid

1. Enrolling in a course that is not approved by your state EMS office
2. Waiting months after the course to take the NREMT exam
3. Memorizing answers instead of practicing assessment and decision-making
4. Treating clinical shifts casually when they often lead to job offers
5. Ignoring background check rules that could block licensure in your state
6. Letting CPR or certification lapse by missing continuing education
7. Not asking employers about paid training before paying out of pocket

SECTION 10

# 13-week progress tracker

*Fill this in by hand each week.*

| Week | Focus | Done? | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | | | |
| **2** | | | |
| **3** | | | |
| **4** | | | |
| **5** | | | |
| **6** | | | |
| **7** | | | |
| **8** | | | |
| **9** | | | |
| **10** | | | |
| **11** | | | |
| **12** | | | |
| **13** | | | |

SECTION 11

# Resources, salary & disclaimer

## Resources

- **National Registry of EMTs**

https://www.nremt.org

- **NHTSA Office of EMS**

https://www.ems.gov

- **CAAHEP: Find an accredited paramedic program**

https://www.caahep.org

- **National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians (NAEMT)**

https://www.naemt.org

- **BLS: EMTs and Paramedics**

https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/emts-and-paramedics.htm

## Salary

| Bottom 10% | Median | Top 10% |
|---|---|---|
| EMTs: less than $34,130 (paramedics: less than $44,230) | **$44,470 per year for EMTs; $48,150 per year ($23.15 per hour) for EMTs and paramedics combined** | EMTs: more than $62,500 (paramedics: more than $84,850) |

**Outlook:** BLS projects employment of EMTs and paramedics to grow 6% from 2025 to 2035, faster than the average for all occupations, with about 18,200 openings each year. There were about 284,100 jobs in 2025: 181,900 EMTs and 102,200 paramedics. Paramedics had a median of $60,600.

Source: BLS Occupational Outlook Handbook, May 2025 wage data; projections 2025–35 — https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/emts-and-paramedics.htm

**Disclaimer.** Requirements vary by state and change over time. Verify with the official sources listed. This guide is not legal or career advice.