Paramedics Fact Sheets



WHAT DOES A PARAMEDIC DO?

A paramedic, ambulance attendant or emergency medical technician is a person who may be called to any number of settings in an emergency situation.

Paramedics can be licenced for different practitioner levels, including emergency medical responder, primary care, advanced care, or critical care. This document covers general aspects that most paramedics may encounter.

The main duties of a paramedic are to:

- Respond to emergency calls such as sudden illness, accidents (automobile, industrial, etc.), building collapses and natural disasters.
- Provide emergency medical care or care in route to other medical facilities.
- Use proper techniques for first aid, medical treatments, etc.
- Transport the patients to the required hospital or other medical facilities for further medical care as appropriate.
- Educate the public on health and safety issues.

What are some health and safety issues for paramedics?

Paramedics may experience:

- Exposure to contagious or infectious diseases from patients or needles.
- Working with the various chemicals used in medical procedures such as halothane, nitrous oxide and ethyl chloride.
- Exposure to other chemicals, products, pharmaceuticals and medicine, including opioids.
- Potential allergic reaction to latex gloves.
- Physical tasks that involve awkward postures, repetition, force or overexertion that can lead to injuries such as musculoskeletal disorders.
- Exposure to extreme temperatures or conditions.
- Risk of injury from the various locations where paramedics may be called to. For example, fire, explosion, unstable structures and surfaces, falling objects, or working near traffic, water, large crowds, exposure to toxic gases, violent situations, etc.
- Slips, trips and falls often compounded by the fact that the paramedic is carrying a patient on a stretcher.
- Risk of motor vehicle incidents due to high speeds, collisions, sudden stops, weather conditions. etc.
- Shift work, extended work days, and resulting fatigue.

- Periods of intense psychological stress or trauma.
- Workplace violence and harassment when dealing with hostile patients or at the workplace.

What are some preventive measures for a paramedic?

Experience and extensive safety and skills training are the best protection for a paramedic.

- Wash your hands frequently- an important step in reducing the risk of infection.
- Know the routine practices to prevent contracting blood borne pathogens.
- Understanding other additional measures for reducing exposure to infectious diseases, such as COVID-19.
- Learn safe lifting techniques, such as manual material handling and patient handling techniques
- Be aware of your surroundings to avoid trips and falls.
- Avoid or take frequent breaks from work that involves awkward physical positions.
- Follow a recommended shift work pattern, and be aware of the fatigue and other hazards associated with shift work.
- Know the hazards of confined spaces and hazardous environments
- Follow or establish safety procedures for working alone, or for avoiding working alone wherever possible.
- Learn about stress and post-traumatic stress, and consider a debriefing session or counselling after a critical or traumatic event.
- Exercise regularly to keep fit and reduce the risk of injury.

What are some good general safe work practices?

Ensure that you are trained and informed about how to avoid the various health and safety hazards of your job. Read about these:

- Health and wellness
- Chemical hazards and WHMIS.
- Blood borne diseases such as AIDS, or hepatitis.
- The importance of hand washing.
- Needlestick injuries.
- Proper selection, use, maintenance and storage of personal protective equipment.
- Safe lifting techniques.
- Preventing slips, trips and falls.
- Fall Protection.
- Shift work.
- Fatigue.
- Fire safety.
- Working alone or working alone with patients.
- Working safely with compressed gases.
- Hazard identification and risk assessments.

Always:

- Follow company safety rules.
- Know how to report a hazard.
- Follow good housekeeping procedures.

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