

New Jersey Emergency Medical Services Fitness for Duty Guidelines:

Applicability:

All New Jersey Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Agencies, including but not limited to, licensed, non-licensed, non-affiliated, volunteer, municipal, fire, first aid, first responder, rescue, dispatch, hospital, corporate and private agencies and/or their agents.

Background:

EMS personnel are confronted, daily, with a diverse, difficult, and dynamic work environment, which demands dedication, regular education, and a focus on providing accurate and critical lifesaving emergency medical services. EMS is a stressful occupation and may lead to emotional turmoil and psychological issues. Current research has demonstrated that depression and alcohol/substance abuse and lack of physical fitness are not uncommon.

Statement:

The Department of Health recognizes that a commitment by EMS Agencies and the individual providers to promoting a safe and healthy environment is essential. Such an environment is possible only when each volunteer, employee and student is able to perform his or her job duties in a safe, secure, and effective manner, and remains able to do so throughout the entire time they are on duty. Any volunteer, paid provider or student who is not fit for duty may present a safety risk to themselves and to others.

The Department has determined that a focused effort, which includes the establishment of Fitness for Duty guidelines within all EMS agencies is necessary to reduce and combat the risks to EMS providers, their families, agencies, patients, and the public at large.

Discussion:

EMS providers, which include paid and volunteer responders, students and dispatchers, are frequently exposed to stressful situations. Studies demonstrated many providers work in excess of 50 hours per week and the overwhelming majority of EMS providers are poor sleepers. They often work excessive hours at multiple jobs with no required or enforced rest period prior to work. Many providers, supervisors and administrators, have inadequate education on how to identify and manage physical and mental stress including fatigue. EMS providers are at high risk for emotional unrest and exhaustion. Without intervention, physical, mental and emotional fatigue can lead to burnout and deterioration of personal life.

A provider's Fitness for Duty in EMS can be affected by many factors including:

- Hours of work
- Rest period prior to work
- Substance abuse
- Psychological fitness
- Physical fitness

Policy:

All EMS agencies should develop and implement policies and procedures, in consultation with subject matter experts, which address at a minimum:

- Pre-employment and pre-volunteer screening including:
 - Psychological exam
 - Medical exam
 - Functional fitness exam
- Ongoing stress and wellness assessment programs
- Intervention: Peer and Professional including Employee Assistance Programs and Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM)
- Designation of a credentialed Health/Safety Officer
- Non-punitive method for self-reporting
- Provider and Supervisory education including:
 - Identification of events
 - Messages for supervisory staff to communicate to affected providers following potentially disturbing/trigger events
- Operational safe practices
- Notification procedures for dispatch agencies to inform supervisory and administrative staff of potential concerns
- Wellness education programs including:
 - Stress Management
 - Nutrition
 - Exercise
 - Sleep/fatigue management
 - Hygiene
 - Smoking cessation
 - Substance/alcohol abuse
- Hours of work
- Rest period prior to work
- Post Incident Follow-up evaluation of the provider's fitness for duty including but not limited to:
 - Drug or alcohol impairment by observation
 - Testing when appropriate
 - Lack of rest by provider admission or direct observation
 - A review of hours worked during the previous 24 hours

- Incidents requiring evaluation include but are not limited to:
 - Any death or injury that occurred to a patient, passenger or crewmember while being treated, transported, riding in the provider's vehicle or while on duty as a result of an incident or unusual occurrence;
 - Any motor vehicle collision
 - Any instance where a crewmember acts outside of his or her approved scope of practice

References

1. New Jersey Culture of Safety: Psychological Support Guidelines, <http://www.state.nj.us/health/ems/special-services/culture-of-safety/>
2. New Jersey Culture of Safety: Physical Fitness Guidelines, <http://www.state.nj.us/health/ems/special-services/culture-of-safety/>
3. New Jersey Culture of Safety: KPI Safety Guidelines, <http://www.state.nj.us/health/ems/special-services/culture-of-safety/>
4. EMSWorld.com: Are You Fit for Duty? <http://www.emsworld.com/article/11143454/ems-physical-fitness-standards>

Resources

NAEMT Recommended Physical Fitness Guidelines:

<https://www.naemt.org/emshealthsafety/EMSFitness/recommended-ems-fitness-guidelines>

NHTSA Driver Medical Fitness Guidelines:

<https://www.ems.gov/pdf/811210.pdf>

JEMS Making the Case for EMS Work Hour Restrictions:

<http://www.jems.com/articles/print/volume-40/issue-9/departments-columns/field-physicians0/making-the-case-for-ems-work-hour-restrictions.html>

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