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Frequently Asked Questions About the Volunteer Fire Service

What are the qualifications/requirements to become a volunteer firefighter in New York State?

While individual fire department requirements may vary – say different minimum ages for entry from 16 to 18 for example – overall to be a volunteer firefighter you need to be an adult who is physically able to perform the duties of the type of fire department role you are applying for. The physical and medical qualifications to be an interior firefighter may vary from those for an exterior firefighter, emergency medical service provider or support member.

Is there a maximum age to join my local fire department?

No, there is not a maximum age to join your local volunteer fire department. If you are physically able to meet the medical requirements for the role you are applying for, your application will be considered. Also keep in mind that while you may not meet the medical/physical criteria to be an interior firefighter, you may meet the criteria to serve as an exterior firefighter, a driver, fire police member, EMS provider or fill an important support role.

I have no prior firefighting or emergency medical experience – can I still join?

YES! The majority of our volunteer firefighters and EMS providers come to the volunteer fire service with no prior firefighting or emergency medical experience. Your local fire department and local training centers and programs will provide you all the training you need.

Firefighting and EMS duties can be dangerous – what will the fire department do to protect me while I am responding to emergencies?

Your local fire department will provide you with all the emergency personal protective equipment (PPE) you need to be kept safe while responding to emergency calls in your community – and all at no cost to you! The fire department or the local government authority having jurisdiction over your fire department will also provide volunteer firefighters and EMS providers with a program of insurance coverage similar to workers' compensation for medical treatment of fire department duty-related injuries and illness with no out-of-pocket cost to the injured or ill firefighter.

The fire department responds to all kinds of emergencies, often including medical calls. They are out in the community during all these responses and I have concerns about exposure to COVID-19. What steps do local fire departments take to protect their members from the virus?

Fire departments across the state have developed local plans to do all they can to protect their members' health and safety while operating at emergency calls of all types during this global pandemic. Local fire departments provide members with virus-related PPE for those encountering COVID-positive or potential COVID-positive individuals. Local fire departments have also developed individualized cleaning protocols and programs for their equipment, apparatus and facilities, including PPE and social distance guidelines for use by volunteers responding to calls or in fire stations for training or other essential duties.