DEA Regulations for Emergency Medical Services

Updated 3/13/2026

The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) officially published its final rule implementing the Protecting Patient Access to Emergency Medications Act of 2017 (PPAEMA) on February 5, 2026. The rule, effective March 9, 2026, requires all EMS agencies that are not owned or operated by a hospital to obtain a controlled substance registration from the DEA.

DEA created a new "Emergency Medical Services Agency" registration category, with a three-year fee equal to other dispenser registrations ($888). ***Please be advised that there are fee waivers for EMS agencies operated by state and local governments (see guidance below).*** The rule also includes federal requirements for the security and recordkeeping of controlled substances by EMS agencies. To apply for a new EMS DEA registration, visit: https://deadiversion.usdoj.gov/drugreg/registration.html

Fee Waiver Guidance from DEA for State and Local Government EMS Agencies

This information is taken directly from the Final Rule notice published by the DEA.

Issue: An anonymous commenter had a question regarding the exemption from DEA application fees for EMS agencies. This commenter understood the proposed rule as exempting fire department EMS from paying the application fees, but not EMS-only agencies, and asked why this was so.

DEA Response: Pursuant to the existing provisions of 21 CFR 1301.21(a)(1), "any hospital or other institution which is operated by an agency of the United States, . . . of any State, or any political subdivision or agency thereof" is exempt from application fees. If an EMS agency were operated by the fire department, and the fire department is operated by the local government, it would be exempt from application fees. Even if the EMS agency is not operated

by a government fire department, if the EMS agency itself is operated by the local government, it would also be exempt from application fees. A privately-owned EMS agency, which is not operated by the local government, is therefore not exempt from paying application fees due to its non-governmental affiliation.

For more information on fee waivers, please contact DEA directly:

- Call: 1-800-882-9539 (8:30 am-5:50 pm ET)
- E-mail: DEA.Registration.Help@dea.gov

The Board is aware that such a short turn-around time may be difficult for some Ohio EMS agencies that do not currently hold their own registration from the DEA, as they have been obtaining controlled substances under a hospital registration through drug exchanges.

To assist EMS agencies in complying with these new federal regulations, the Board developed this guidance document. If you need additional information, the most expedient way to have your questions answered will be to e-mail the Board office by visiting: www.pharmacy.ohio.gov/contact.

Q1) Is my EMS agency required to have a DEA registration?

This question depends on how the EMS agency is structured:

- **Hospital-based EMS agencies:** May continue to operate under the hospital's existing practitioner registration and are not required to obtain a separate EMS agency registration.
- **All other EMS agencies:** An EMS agency may choose a single DEA registration per state instead of separate registrations for each station, so long as it is authorized under that state's law.
    - **IMPORTANT:** This is permissible under Ohio law and Board of Pharmacy regulations, as Ohio recognizes headquarters and satellite locations. Therefore, only the main EMS agency headquarters (e.g., the location holding a Terminal Distributor of Dangerous Drugs license from the Board of Pharmacy with an "EM – EMS Headquarters" subclassification) is required to apply for a DEA EMS registration.

REMINDER: DEA has issued guidance indicating that EMS agencies operated by state and local governments are exempt from registration fees.

Q2) Will the Board cite EMS agencies for not holding their own DEA registration?

Any current inspections of existing EMS agencies will serve to educate licensees on this requirement and will not result in a citation. This enforcement discretion also applies to hospitals that may be providing EMS agencies with controlled substances using drug exchanges. Any change in this enforcement discretion will be communicated to licensees with advanced notice.

Q3) If I do not have a registration by March 9, 2026, does this mean that my agency cannot possess or administer controlled substances?

As a matter of patient safety, the Board is not advising any EMS agency without an active DEA registration to cease the administration and possession of controlled substances. Rather, it is strongly advised that each EMS agency that is required to obtain a DEA registration do so for its headquarters as soon as practical.

Information regarding a DEA registration to handle controlled substances can be obtained by contacting:

- Call: 1-800-882-9539 (8:30 am-5:50 pm ET)
- E-mail: DEA.Registration.Help@dea.gov

Q4) How will other provisions of the rule impact my agency operations?

The Board is currently reviewing the newly finalized regulations and will be updating the EMS Inspection Guide and any rules as needed.

It should be noted that as licensed terminal distributors of dangerous drugs, EMS agencies are already required to maintain complete records of all controlled substances received, administered, transferred, and destroyed.

EMS agencies are encouraged to review a copy of the final regulations and the NPRM here: https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2026/02/05/2026-02288/registering-emergency-medical-services-agencies-under-the-protecting-patient-access-to-emergency

Q5) Am I required to notify the DEA of any satellite locations once I obtain my registration?

Yes. DEA registered EMS agencies may deliver controlled substances from their registered location (e.g., TDDD EMS HQ) to unregistered "designated locations" that qualify as stationhouses (e.g., TDDD EMS satellite). To do so, the agency must identify each designated location (name and physical address) via the DEA's website.

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- E-mail: DEA.Registration.Help@dea.gov

Q6) How do I apply for a DEA registration?

To apply for a new EMS DEA registration, visit:
https://deadiversion.usdoj.gov/drugreg/registration.html