



#PlayToday

info@playaustralia.org.au
www.playaustralia.org.au

promoting the value of play

PLATFORMS (DECKS) IN OUTDOOR PLAY AREAS

Definition

The term 'deck' is not used in Australian Standards. Instead the term 'platform' is preferred, defined broadly as any *"raised surface where one or more users can stand without the need of hand support"* (AS4685.1 3.21).

Standards goes further, in fact, suggesting that if you don't want your standing surface to be defined as a platform you might consider making modifications such as

- *reducing the surface area to restrict free movement and encourage holding on;*
- *incline the surface to encourage holding on;*
- *introducing movement to the surface to encourage holding on.*

In practice, like many issues related to standards, this leaves a lot of room for judgement calls.

Design Considerations

When thinking about the appropriate size of a platform it is important to ask what the platform is intended to do and in what context. There are significant differences between the requirements of a platform used as a landing area for a busy school's monkey bars, a platform for the same equipment in an isolated park, a tree house deck in a kindergarten, and a landing deck where wheelchairs turn around.

To minimise the chance of conflict with other children activities that are particularly challenging or that require 'whole of body' movement will ideally have either their own dedicated platforms or dedicated clear zone within a larger-sized deck. Children climbing from a high rock climbing wall, for example, will commonly exit the activity by lying face down on the upper platform. Similarly, children using monkey bars require clear space to balance/stabilise at each end. In these cases insufficient separation may cause conflict between children exiting activities and children traversing a deck on the way to something else.

Where there is a continuity of sequence between activities children going in opposite directions should be able to pass safely. For square platforms along a traffic route a minimum area to allow for would be around 900-1000mm, potentially a bit less in Supervised Early Childhood Services (SECS) and likely larger in the case of irregular platforms.

Australian Standards

Once a standing surface has been defined as a platform (that is, any surface that a child can stand on without hand support) the primary consideration in complying with standards is how to prevent children accidentally falling out. To achieve this *guardrails* and/or *barriers* must completely surround a platform except for any openings necessary for entrances and exits.

A *guardrail* is normally a single rail between two posts where users can pass underneath. This rail is intended to act both as hand support and to prevent a child from accidentally topping out. The rail that most people will be familiar with running across the entrance to a slide is an example of a guardrail.

A *barrier* is intended to prevent users from passing underneath, and must have no intermediate horizontal or near horizontal rails or bars that can be used as steps by children attempting to climb. Barriers should also be designed so as to discourage children from sitting or standing on them.

The maximum width of entrance and exit openings in barriers and guardrails, with the exception of stairs, ramps and bridges, is 500 mm unless a guardrail is provided. For stairs, ramps and bridges the width of the exit opening in the guardrail must be no greater than the width of these elements.

The maximum difference in height between two platforms in the one cluster is 1000mm, where the lower platform is within the upper platform's impact area (fallzone) unless the lower platform has an appropriate amount of impact attenuation.

Stairs are dealt with separately from platforms under Australian standards and have their own particular requirements.

Supervised Early Childhood Services

All platforms 600mm or higher above the playing surface require a barrier.

Other playspaces

Platforms that are "easily accessible" (reachable with the use of relatively simple motor skills such as via stairs, fixed-rung ladders or similar) must have a barrier at or above 600mm high.

Where a platform is not easily accessible no guardrails or barriers are required up to 999mm above the playing surface.

Between 1000mm and 1999mm only guardrails are required.

Barriers must be provided at or above 2000mm.

6 June 2021