

Childcare – Designing change table steps for children

What is the problem?

Employees getting musculoskeletal disorders from lifting toddlers and older children onto change tables because there aren't any steps, or if steps are provided, they are not suitable for small children.

What are the risks?

Some change table steps have poor design, such as:

- adult-sized steps
- uneven step heights and lengths
- no handrails or side barriers to prevent falls.

These aspects can lead to childcare workers being injured while attempting to prevent small children falling from the steps or while assisting children use the steps.

In some instances, the children and childcare workers find the steps too difficult to position or use, and children must be lifted manually on and off the change table. This also happens when there are no steps at all.

All these situations contribute to the high numbers of musculoskeletal disorders reported by childcare workers.

What is a solution to the problem?

Use well-designed change table steps that:

- are lightweight and scaled appropriately for 18-24 month old children, with consistent size and depth that allow children to walk up to change table height
- have handrails and fall protection on both sides
- have a locking mechanism to prevent unintended movement during use
- are moved into position with little force either by a pull cord or handle located at the top
- have rollers, tracks and runners with suitable end stops fitted to the step frame
- are made of lightweight, sturdy materials and designed so that no bending is required to set them in place.

Steps should be designed to fit in a cupboard space under the change table bench between uses so they do not obstruct space in the room for other activities.

Suggested size of steps

Rise	140mm
Run	180mm
Total unit length	900mm
Total unit height	840mm (to fit under the change table)
Number of steps	5+1 to the bench

Further Information

WorkSafe Advisory Service

Toll-free: 1800 136 089

Email: info@worksafe.vic.gov.au

worksafe.vic.gov.au

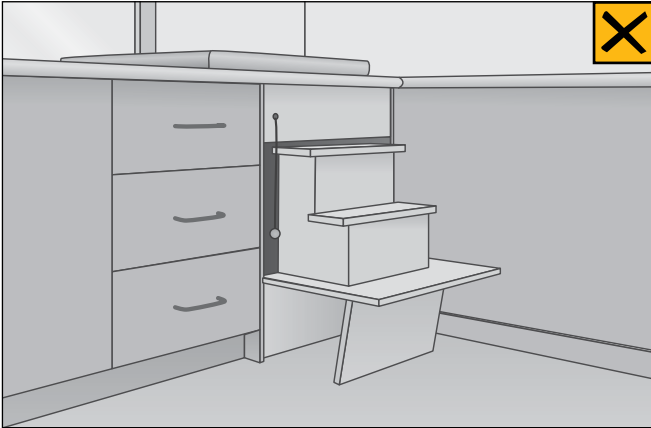
Australian Standard

AS 4685.1-2004 – *Playground equipment – General safety requirements and test methods* (provides a guide to step size).

(Health and Safety Solution continued overleaf.)

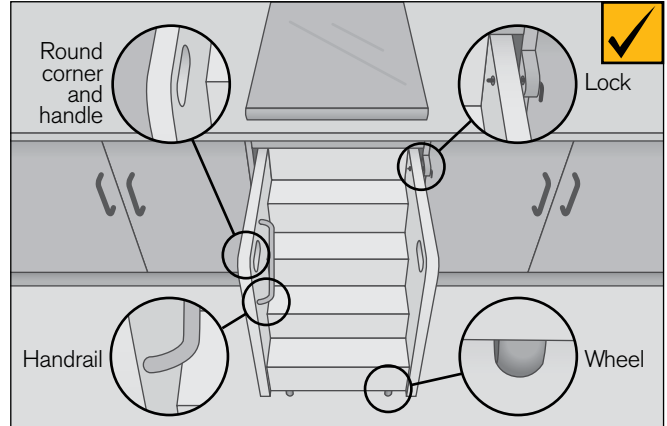
A Health and Safety Solution

The problem



Poorly designed steps that are not secure, have uneven step heights and length, are unsuitable for small children to use, have no handrails and are awkward to move.

A solution



Well-designed steps that have a locking mechanism to prevent unintended movement during use, small even steps and side barrier with no sharp corners. Steps also easily roll away underneath the cupboard. Handrails should be fitted to assist the child's stability.