

Construction Codes Advisory

Promoting construction of safe, healthy, habitable buildings

Bedroom Egress Windows

Question

What are the minimum requirements for egress windows in bedrooms of residential homes?

Answer

The National Building Code of Canada (NBC) 2020 specifies the minimum unobstructed opening size for bedroom windows to ensure adequate natural ventilation and provide a means of emergency escape.

Background

The NBC 2020 includes general provisions for the placement of windows, doors and skylights. The NBC 2020, Division B, Sentence 9.9.10.1.(2) states:

The window shall:

- Provide an unobstructed opening of not less than 0.35 m^2 (3.77 ft^2) in area with no dimension less than 380 mm (15 inches).
- Maintain the required opening during an emergency without the need for additional support.

Windows or Doors for Bedrooms

Unless a dwelling is equipped with sprinklers, every bedroom or combination bedroom must have at least one outside window or exterior door that can be opened from the inside without the use of tools or special knowledge. This ensures a means of escape or rescue in case of

an emergency. The window or exterior door must meet the minimum unobstructed opening requirements specified in Sentence 9.9.10.1.(2). The path of escape must not pass through or open onto another room, floor or space. Bedroom windows required for emergency escape or rescue must remain open without support during an emergency. (See Figure 1.)

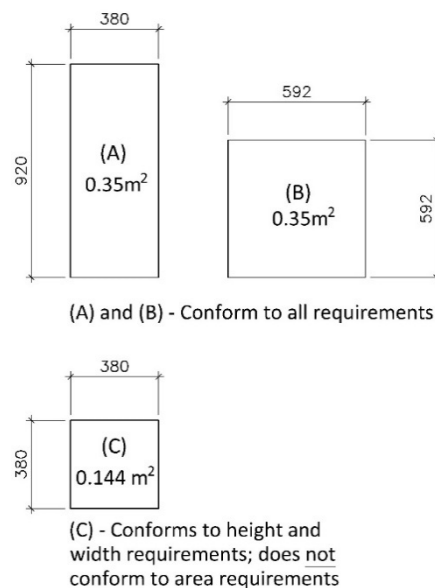


Figure 1

Compliance with *The Construction Codes Act*, *The Building Code Regulations* and the National Building Code of Canada (NBC) 2020 is addressed in this advisory. Words in italics, other than Act and regulation titles, are defined in the NBC 2020.

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Window Height Placement

The NBC 2020 introduced new requirements for *guards* that can affect the height of bedroom egress windows.

NBC 2020, Division B, Article 9.8.8.1. specifies that operable windows in residential occupancies must be protected by a *guard* or a mechanism that restricts any clear unobstructed opening to not more than 100 mm (four inches). This restriction does not apply if the bottom edge of the operable portion of the window is:

- More than 900 mm (three feet) above the finished floor; or
- Less than 1800 mm (six feet) above the floor or ground on the other side of the window.

Bedroom egress windows must comply with both the *guard* requirements of Article 9.8.8.1. and the bedroom egress window requirements of Sentence 9.9.10.1.(2).

Typically, bedroom egress windows located more than 1800 mm (six feet) above the floor or ground on the other side of the window will have their sill located at least 900 mm (three feet) above the finished floor to meet Article 9.8.8.1. and Sentence 9.9.10.1.(2).

It is recommended that window sills intended for emergency *exits* be no higher than 1500 mm (five feet) above the finished floor. If achieving this height is challenging, such as with *basement* bedroom windows, access can be improved by placing built-in furniture beneath the window. (See Figure 2.)

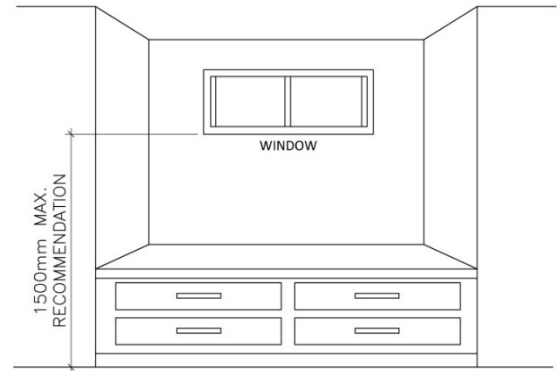


Figure 2

Window Types

There are various types of windows available, but not all are appropriate for use as bedroom egress windows.

Awning-style windows do not meet bedroom egress requirements if their opening mechanism obstructs the minimum opening area or if the sash does not stay open without additional support.

Hopper windows (bottom-hinged) should not be used as escape windows if occupants need to climb over the glass to *exit*.

Basement Windows

If a bedroom is in a *basement*, it must have its own escape window or door. Egress through another *basement* space to reach an escape window or door is not sufficient.

A bedroom *basement* window may open into a window well, depending on the height of the finished grade.

When a bedroom egress window opens into a window well, it must have at least 760 mm (30 inches) of clearance in front of the window. If the window well has a protective cover, it must be openable from the inside without the use of tools, keys or special knowledge.

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Once the 760 mm (30 inches) is provided, no additional clearance is required for windows with sliders, casements or inward-opening awning style windows. (See Figure 3.) However, outward-opening awning-style windows require additional clearance to provide the required 760 mm (30 inches) beyond the outer edge of the sash. (See Figure 4.)

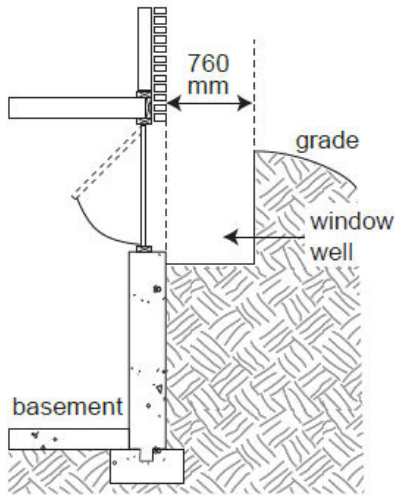


Figure 3

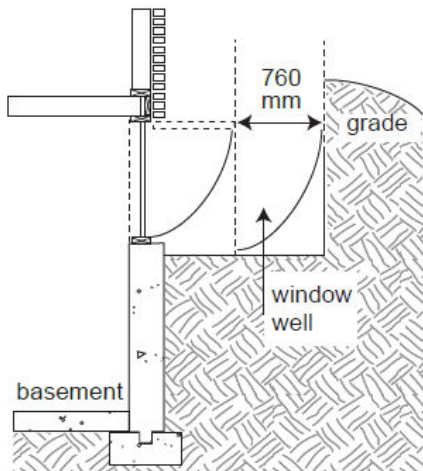


Figure 4

Other Window Considerations

Ice build-up that prevents or restricts the opening of a window is a concern with any type of window. However, with advancements in heating and ventilating systems and improved window construction, ice build-up is less of a concern than previously.

Latches inside the window frame do not require special knowledge to release. These latches are typically used for security or to ensure the window is shut tightly and are released as part of the normal opening process.

Insect screens, security bars, grilles or similar devices should be easily removable or releasable from the inside without the use of a key, tool or special knowledge.

Children who may need to escape through a bedroom window on their own should be taught how to open the window and remove or release any screens or bars that may be installed. Home fire drills should include practicing using the window as a means of escape. For individuals who are too young or physically unable to escape on their own through a window, consider relocating the bedroom to the first storey or closer to an exterior door to assist with their rescue.

Building and Technical Standards Branch
1430 - 1855 Victoria Avenue
Regina, Saskatchewan S4P 3T2
306-787-4113 Phone
btstandards@gov.sk.ca
www.saskatchewan.ca/btstandards

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