

# GENDER-NEUTRAL TOILET ROOMS

## What to Consider When Discussing Design

### GENDER-NEUTRAL TOILET ROOMS - FOR EVERYONE.....

When the topic of Gender-Neutral Toilet Rooms comes up in our current society many people's first thoughts run to providing a place for gender diverse people to take care of a basic human function. But I hope you think of providing a safe place for all people regardless of their sexuality, gender, preferences, physical abilities or health care needs to use a public toilet room.

Historically communal latrines, such as those in Rome, were not separated by gender. It wasn't until 1739 that the first gender-segregated toilets appeared at a ball in Paris and it wasn't until 1887 that gender-segregated toilets became the law in Massachusetts. This came about in factories and businesses when women started entering the workforce. Within three decades every state passed its own version of the law.

Generally, the segregation of genders, colors and mobility level for the past 150 years can be associated with societal apprehensions of being grouped with someone different while taking care of personal bodily functions.

Common fears in public toilet rooms are a lack of privacy, the possibility of being bullied or assaulted and threats to unaccompanied children. The odd thing is, when you research toilet rooms, you will find that these fears are assigned to gender-neutral spaces but are happening currently in gender-segregated spaces. Forty-three percent of our students of all genders avoid the use of toilet rooms while they are at school because of this fear, and that may result in dehydration, urinary tract or bladder infection, urinary leakage and poor concentration.



## THREE BASIC DESIGNS

There are three basic designs for toilet rooms in public spaces including schools, airports and auditoriums in the United States and parts of the modern western world.

### 1 TYPICAL GENDER-SEGREGATED TOILET ROOMS:

Rows of toilets with American stalls

American-style stalls typically have a 12-inch gap at the floor and are 6 feet above the floor. They will generally have a ½ inch gap on each side of the door and at a wall.

Rows of urinals with privacy screens

The screen starts 12-inches above the floor and reaches to not less than 60-inches above the floor. The screen reaches at least 18-inches from the wall.

Considerations:

- Women may feel uncomfortable attending to menstrual needs and those with Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) may feel uncomfortable attending to their needs.

### 2 CLUSTERED SINGLE-USER GENDER-NEUTRAL TOILET ROOMS:

This arrangement has individual rooms with handwashing sink, mirror, and toilet. By code 50% of the rooms are to be mobility accessible.

Caretakers of any gender mobility-challenged person, elder or child who needs help using the toilet, benefit from these single-user or “family” toilet rooms.

In the 2018 IBC Section 2902.1.2, it states that “single-user facilities and bathing rooms and family or assisted-use toilets and bathing rooms shall be identified for use by either sex.”

Considerations:

- This arrangement requires additional heating and ventilation materials as well as light fixtures & door hardware.
- It is more difficult to supervise and identify problematic behaviors, such as smoking or vaping, self-harm or the victimization of a person who has been trapped in a single-user room against their will.



### 3 HYBRID GENDER-NEUTRAL TOILET ROOMS:

Rows of toilets with European-style stall

European Stalls can have 4-to-6-inch gaps at the floor. Doors and side panels are 6’ 6” tall with no gaps at the doors or walls. Or can be floor-to-ceiling systems with no gaps at door or walls. There are no urinals.

At least 5% of the stalls but not less than 1 are mobility accessible as required by code.

Separating the space into areas for grooming, hand washing and eliminating are key design features to the Hybrid Toilet Room.

Often this design includes separate single-user toilet rooms or special use rooms to help breastfeeding mothers, those needing to administer medication or perform religious rites, and people with physical or mental disabilities.

Considerations:

- This arrangement requires additional heating and ventilation materials as well as light fixtures and door hardware.
- This style should have two points of entry/exit or a window at the dead end to promote safety and security.
- It is inherently safer for any victimized individuals because of the higher volume of users and enhanced natural surveillance.

Barriers to both the Cluster Single-User toilets and the Hybrid Gender-Neutral toilets are:

- Financial and spatial constraints
- Building code compliance – the IBC requires specific numbers of fixtures per gender
- Resistance from parents/adults
- Privacy and confidentiality concerns
- Cultural appropriateness.

Clear signage is a must when using either of the three design options for toilet rooms. Basic words and symbols which communicate gendered or gender-neutral spaces must be able to be consistently understood by different people to avoid conflict and uncertainty.



**The most basic reason to consider gender-neutral toilet rooms is equality – no one is segregated or separated by gender or mobility level.** Using the term “Universal Design” rather than gender-neutral, all-gender or unisex toilets may reduce resistance within the public perception. In our own homes we experience gender-neutral bath/toilet rooms on a daily basis – a toilet, tub or shower, sink and a door that locks. Why can’t we follow this pattern in our public lives?



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