

Institutional Occupancy - Group I

2025 California Building Code §308 - Groups I-2, I-3 and I-4

Purpose. Group I covers occupancies where people receive care or supervision and may be unable to self-preserve without physical assistance, or where occupants are restrained, detained or subject to security measures that restrict free egress.

1. California Group I Structure

In the 2025 California Building Code, Group I-1 is not used; comparable supervised residential-care occupancies are addressed under California residential classifications such as Group R-2.1.

The active institutional classifications are I-2, I-3 and I-4.

Code reference: 2025 CBC §§308.1-308.2

2. Institutional Subclassifications

Code reference: 2025 CBC §§308.3-308.5

Group	Primary condition	Representative examples
I-2	24-hour medical care for more than five persons who are nonambulatory, bedridden or incapable of self-preservation	Hospitals, nursing homes, psychiatric hospitals, detoxification and certain foster-care facilities
I-3	More than five persons under restraint/security where egress is controlled	Jails, prisons, detention/correctional facilities, juvenile halls, secure treatment/holding facilities
I-4	Custodial care for more than six clients for less than 24 hours	Adult day care and child day care not classified as Group E

3. I-3 Occupancy Conditions

Group I-3 is further divided into occupancy conditions based on the degree to which occupants can move between sleeping/activity spaces, smoke compartments and the exterior. California includes additional special conditions for temporary holding and secure interview facilities. The exact condition directly affects construction, locking, smoke-compartment and egress requirements.

Code reference: 2025 CBC §§308.4.1-308.4.9; CBC §408

4. Care-Facility Classification Boundaries

- Small medical-care facilities can be classified as residential where the specific CBC conditions and sprinkler provisions are met.
- Child-care facilities can be Group E when the age, number of children, floor location and direct-exit conditions satisfy CBC §305/§308.
- Six-or-fewer residential care facilities often fall into California Group R-3.1 rather than Institutional Group I.
- Where a facility contains both ambulatory and nonambulatory persons, more restrictive requirements can apply.

Code reference: 2025 CBC §§305, 308 and 310

5. Fire & Life-Safety Review Considerations

- Verify the actual use of each room, tenant space and outdoor/rooftop area; a building can contain more than one occupancy group.
- Determine occupant load and means-of-egress requirements under CBC Chapter 10.
- Evaluate automatic sprinkler and fire alarm requirements under CBC/CFC Chapter 9.
- Check allowable building height/area, construction type and occupancy separation requirements under CBC Chapters 5 through 7.
- Maintain required fire department access, water supply, addressing, key-box access and fire protection equipment access as applicable.
- Changes in use or occupancy can trigger a new code analysis even when little or no construction work is proposed.
- Institutional occupancies require special attention to staff-assisted evacuation, smoke compartments, delayed/controlled egress, locking, emergency power, fire alarm/voice communication and automatic sprinkler protection.

Code reference: 2025 CBC Chapters 5-10; 2025 CFC Chapters 5, 9 and applicable occupancy/hazard chapters

Primary References

References: 2025 California Building Code §308 - Institutional Group I; 2025 California Building Code §§407 and 408; 2025 California Fire Code §203.7 - Institutional Group I; 2024 International Building Code Chapter 3

Final requirements depend on the actual use, occupant load, building size and construction, mixed occupancies, hazardous materials and fire-protection systems. The fire/building code official makes the final occupancy-classification determination.