

INTRO TO HOCKEY MODEL

[PLAYERS]

A players guide for the introduction and implementation of the Intro to Hockey Model for U7 and U9 Hockey in Alberta.

Updated September 2024



WELCOME

How a player gets his/her initial taste of hockey is crucial. Their first four years of hockey must be a positive experience full of fun and excitement. If the beginner has fun and develops some basic skills and builds confidence, there is a good chance they will go on to enjoy hockey for life.

As a result, it becomes imperative to design hockey programming that is suitable to the age, size, and skill level of the participant, based on the following key principles:



CHILDREN ARE NOT MINIATURE ADULTS



CHILD DEVELOPMENT IS A MARATHON NOT A SPRINT



CHILDREN SHOULD BE BUILT INTO:

People 1st; Athletes 2nd; Hockey players last.

A Minor Hockey Association's programming for its youngest players serves as an important building block upon which the entire MHA is built. Youngsters at every level of play benefit from getting the "right start" in the game.

Hockey Canada made it mandatory that all games are played on cross ice/half ice starting in the 2016-17 season for the U7 age category, and in the 2019-20 season for the U9 age category. Starting February 1, 2024, Hockey Alberta is implementing a U9 Full-Ice Transition to help with the transition from Intro to Hockey to U11. These policies and pilots are designed to address ongoing challenges to player development, including:

OVER-COMPETING AND UNDER-TRAINING.

FUNDAMENTAL MOVEMENT SKILLS AND SPORT SKILLS NOT BEING TAUGHT PROPERLY.

PREPARATION GEARED TO SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES.

A COMPETITION SYSTEM THAT INTERFERES WITH ATHLETE DEVELOPMENT.

EARLY SPECIALIZATION IS DEMANDED.



IT IS OKAY FOR PARENTS TO WANT THEIR KIDS TO GET TO THE HIGHEST LEVELS, BUT WE ALL NEED TO WORK TOGETHER TO IMPLEMENT AND ACHIEVE THE BEST WAY FOR THAT

Hockey Canada mandates that all hockey for players aged eight years and younger (U7 and U9) is to be played according to age-appropriate development guidelines. Minor Hockey Associations not operating according to these standards will be considered in violation of the Hockey Canada policy.

In Alberta, U7 and U9 hockey is now run under the title **Intro to Hockey**.



The goals and objectives of Intro to Hockey programming are to:

01

Teach the basic skills of hockey so players can enjoy the game.

02

Assist in the development and enhancement of physical literacy and basic motor patterns.

03

Deliver a program that is age appropriate for the size, skill and age of the players.

04

Encourage the aspects of fitness, fair play and co-operation while having fun playing the game.

Hockey Alberta's goal through Intro to Hockey is to create a "new normal" which will encourage a cultural change for how players experience the game at Initiation and Novice.

INTRO TO HOCKEY

THE NEW NORMAL

PURPOSE

Give the game back to the kids

OUTCOME

Reach your potential

LOOKS LIKE

Action and activity

FEELS LIKE

Energy and excitement

GAME PLAY RULES

All Minor Hockey Associations are required to operate in compliance with the Hockey Canada Policy on U7 and U9 hockey. The following non-negotiables exist in Hockey Alberta's Intro to Hockey model:

NON-NEGOTIABLES

PLAYING SURFACE FOR GAMES:

- Maximum 8,500 sq./ft (100' x 85')
- U7: for the full season
- U9: through Jan. 31 of current season

HOCKEY CANADA PLAYING RULES:

- Must be followed

GOALTENDERS:

- U7: no goalie equipment except for a goalie stick
- U9: full goalie equipment

GAME PLAY RULES:

- 4 on 4 with a goalie (U7 and U9)
- Continuous play (line changes and stoppages in play)
- Use buzzer for line changes
- Faceoff only to start halves
- No position specialization
- Blue puck is required for U7 game play

GAME ADMINISTRATION RULES:

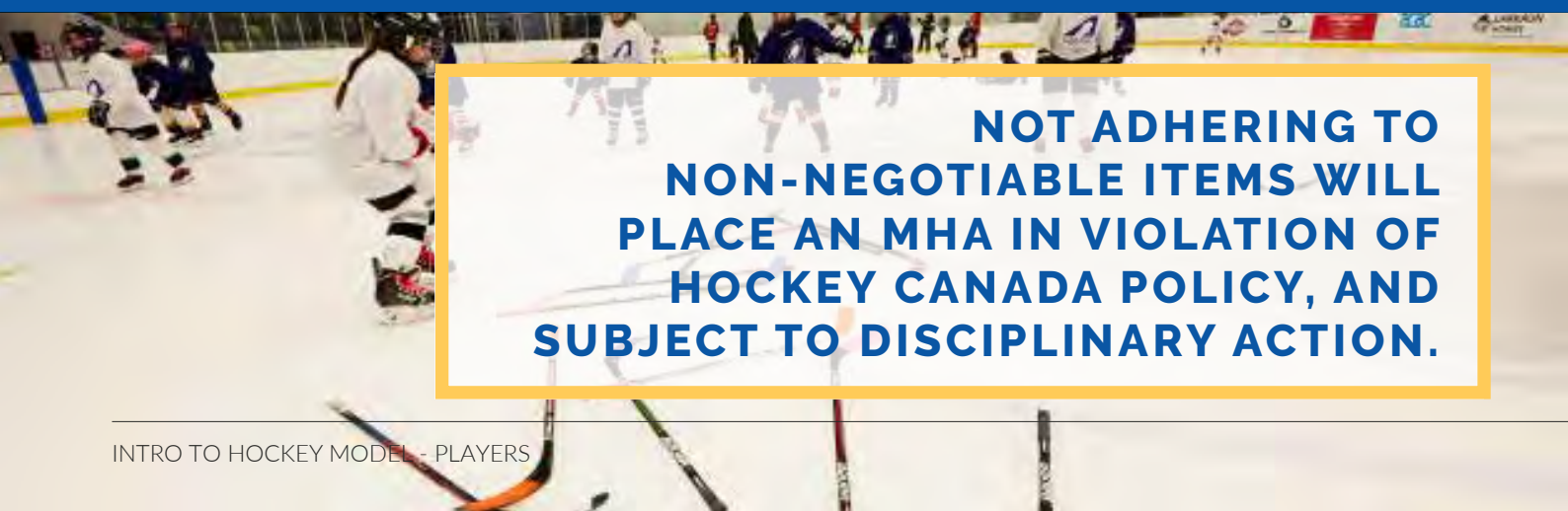
- No score is kept
- No standings or stats kept
- Game summary or game sheet is required for U9

ON-ICE OFFICIALS:

- One (1) official per game for U9
- Game fee \$20 per official
- Officials Report required for major penalties

GENERAL ADMINISTRATION RULES:

- Travel Permits are required
- No Festivals prior to November 1
- Coach requirements (see Pg 16-19) must be met
- Players and team officials can be registered as a program or a team
- No affiliation required



**NOT ADHERING TO
NON-NEGOTIABLE ITEMS WILL
PLACE AN MHA IN VIOLATION OF
HOCKEY CANADA POLICY, AND
SUBJECT TO DISCIPLINARY ACTION.**



SOME AREAS ARE NEGOTIABLE, WHERE AN MHA CAN UTILIZE THESE GUIDELINES TO ADOPT ITS STANDARD:

GAME PLAY AND GENERAL GUIDELINES - U7

- **Shift Length:** recommend 3 minutes or less
- **Blue puck for game play**
- **Game Length:** recommend no longer than an hour with two halves
- **Net size:** recommend 3' x 4'
- **Age groups:** one- or two-year age groups
- **Seasonal Structure:** recommend 2:1 practice to game ratio, ideal season outlined
- **Practice Format:** recommend station work
- **Player Acceleration:** as per MHA policy
- **Player Movement:** determined by the MHA

END OF SEASON TRANSITION PHASE FULL-ICE OPTION GUIDELINES- U9

February 1 to March 30

Maximum of 10 one-time events for MHAs with Major (8 year old) teams

- Games within associations can be controlled scrimmages
- Games played against other MHAs must be considered one-time events, with the appropriate sanction approved by Hockey Alberta

Maximum of 10 one-time events allowed for combined teams (7-8 year olds) and Minor teams (7 year olds)

- Games within associations can be controlled scrimmages
- Games played against other MHAs must be considered one-time events, with the appropriate sanction approved by Hockey Alberta

GENERAL GUIDELINES

- **Shifts:** recommend 1.5 minutes or less
- **Blue or black puck**
- **Game Length:** recommend no longer than an hour with two halves
- **Net size:** 3' x 4' or regulation size (4' x 6')

END OF SEASON TRANSITION PHASE

- **Full ice - 5 vs 5; No score kept.**
- **Penalties:** Instant with no PP. Player goes to player's bench.
- **Officiating:** Coaches for controlled scrimmages; certified officials for one-time events.
- **Goalies:** Rotated, with preference for 8-year-olds
- **After a goal is scored, puck starts from behind the net. Teams back off to top of circles or blue line.**

NEGOTIABLES

NOTES - END OF SEASON TRANSITION PHASE

PENALTIES

- The referee is to make the call and signal the penalty, the offending player goes to their player bench and sits out until their next rotation.
- A player from the next shift joins the play to keep the number of players playing 5 vs 5 (there are no special teams after a penalty call)
- There is no “delayed” penalty call, once the infraction occurs the referee will make the call.
- The play clock does not stop during a penalty call and there is no “penalty time” added to score board.

GOALIES

- Goalies may be switched at the halfway break
- Teams ARE NOT to dress two goalies for the game. There are no “back up” goaltenders allowed.

FACEOFFS

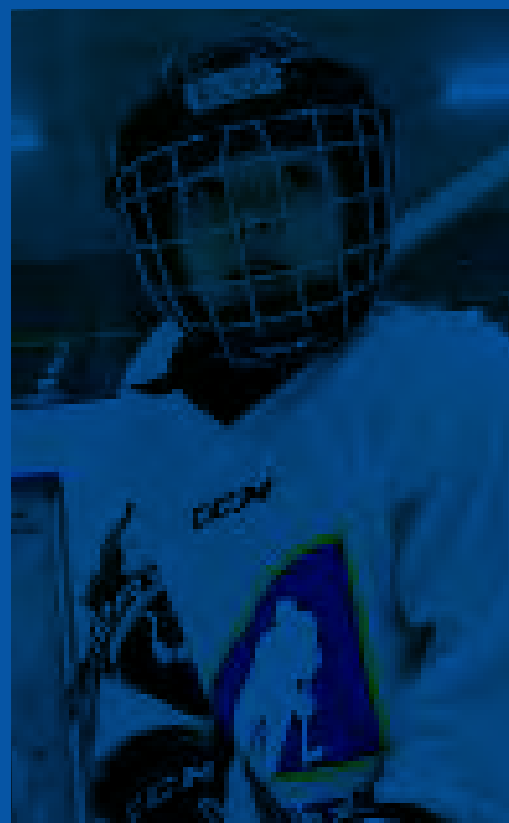
- Faceoffs only occur at the start of each period, NOT after goals, penalties, icings or offsides
- On an icing or offside the referee blows the whistle, makes the appropriate call and gives puck possession to the non-offending team
- The offending team is to back away from the non-offending team and allow them space to start the play again
- This is to maximize playing time for the players and introduce the rules of icing and offside

FESTIVALS

- Festival permits are not permitted during the End of Season Transition Phase.
- If multiple teams gather for an event, each game sanction must be requested as a one-time event, and counts towards the 10-game limit on full-ice one-time events permitted per team during the End of Season Transition Phase.

LEAGUE PLAY

- Games scheduled through a League will take priority of any one-time event scheduled during the End of Season Transition Phase.
- Failure to fulfil your obligation to your League will result in possible discipline, fines and removal of one-time event and festival sanctioning privileges for the remainder of the season.



TEAM STRUCTURE

HOCKEY CANADA GAME PLAY FORMAT

01

Each team consists of up to a maximum of 18 players divided in to two units of 9. Each team unit of 9 players will have 1 goaltender and 8 skaters. Smaller numbers allow for players to double shift to ensure there are always 4 players on the ice. Coaches must make sure all players take turns double shifting.

02

In the large team game model, each team is required to have two goaltenders, one for each half of the ice. This is referred to as the Two or Four Team Game Play Model (see Figure 1), allowing up to four teams playing one another or two larger teams playing one another in two halves. For larger teams divided in two units, each team is required to have two goaltenders, one for each half-ice game.

03

In communities where team composition is smaller, the ice is still divided in halves, but only one half will be used for game play. The other half can be used as a practice surface (see Figure 2).

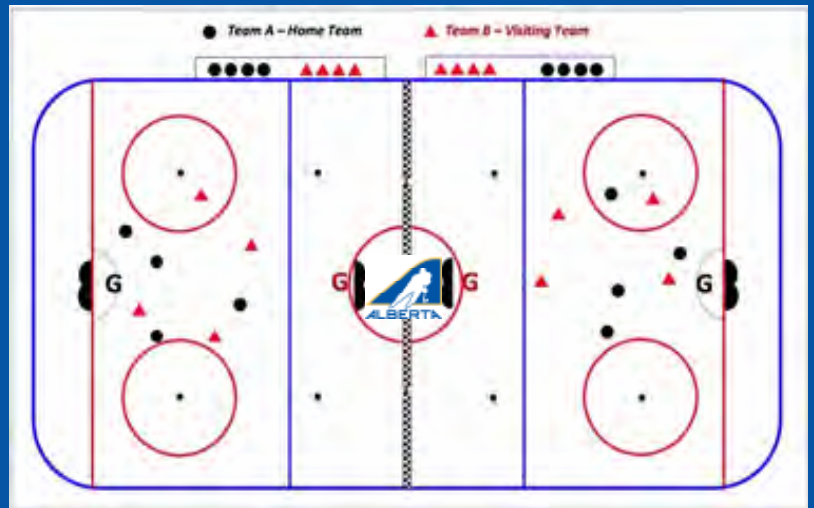


FIGURE 1: LARGE TEAM- TWO HALF ICE GAME MODEL

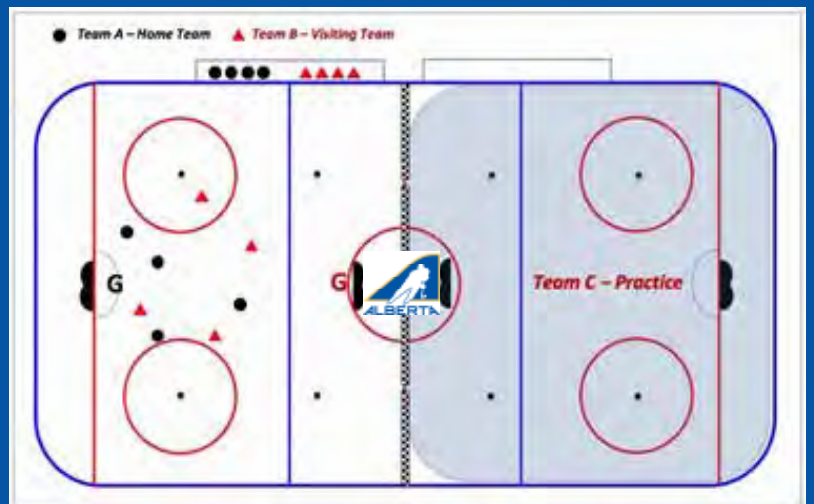


FIGURE 2: SMALL TEAM - ONE HALF ICE GAME MODEL - WITH PRACTICE SHEET OR TWO GAMES

GAME FORMAT

01

Teams will share the respective player benches with each team using the gate closest to the net they are defending.

02

The warm up – 3 minutes.

03

The rink set-up: One (1) set of barriers. It is recommended that in each half of the ice, the centre spot should be marked to indicate where the face off will take place. This mark is to be established at the midpoint between both nets.

04

Game length: 60 minutes total recommended; two (2) 24-27-minute halves recommended.

05

There will be two (2) face-offs during the game: to start the game, and to start the second half. When the buzzer sounds to end the first half, the visiting team will switch ends and switch benches, so players can play against the other half of the opposing team.

06

No score is kept. Game summary or game sheet is required for U9.





SHIFTS

1. Shift length – recommended to be 3 minutes for U7 and 1.5 minutes for U9 with an automatic buzzer or whistle sounding to indicate players change. The clock is run time.
2. Officials or coaches work together to keep the games synchronized. The main score clock can be used as the time keeping device for both games
3. A buzzer or whistle will sound to signal line changes.
4. Players change on the fly.
 - I. If there are fewer than four (4) players on the bench, the active player designated to stay out for the following shift must tag up at the bench prior to playing the loose puck.
 - II. For U7 the first player to enter the ice on a line change is the new goalie.

FROZEN PUCKS, STOPPAGES, GAME FLOW, CHANGE OF POSSESSION

1. The line change procedure does not require a stoppage of play. Associations have the choice of shift length with running time and players changing on the fly.
2. The referee blows the whistle to indicate a change of possession when:
 - a. Goaltender freezes the puck: Attacking players back off at least 3 metres or to a designated marking on the ice. Once the attackers have moved back, the players may resume play as soon as the possession team has the puck.
 - b. Puck shot out of play (over divider or glass): The offending team backs off three metres and the official or coach gives the non-offending team a new puck.
3. When the buzzer/whistle sounds, players must relinquish control of the puck immediately and skate over to their bench gate waiting along the boards until the new players enter onto the ice surface and then they can exit the ice.
4. Failure to immediately relinquish control of the puck at the buzzer or new players entering the ice surface prematurely will result in a change of possession.

When the puck enters the goal, the official will blow the whistle and signal a goal, retrieve the puck from the net and allow the team that was scored on to take possession of the puck. The team that scored backs off 3 metres and gives the player with the puck room to start the play.

GOALS



FACEOFFS

There is one (1) face-off location, located approximately half way between the goals (see Figure 3). Coaches may mark the centre face-off location with a temporary marking for game play purposes but is not necessary.

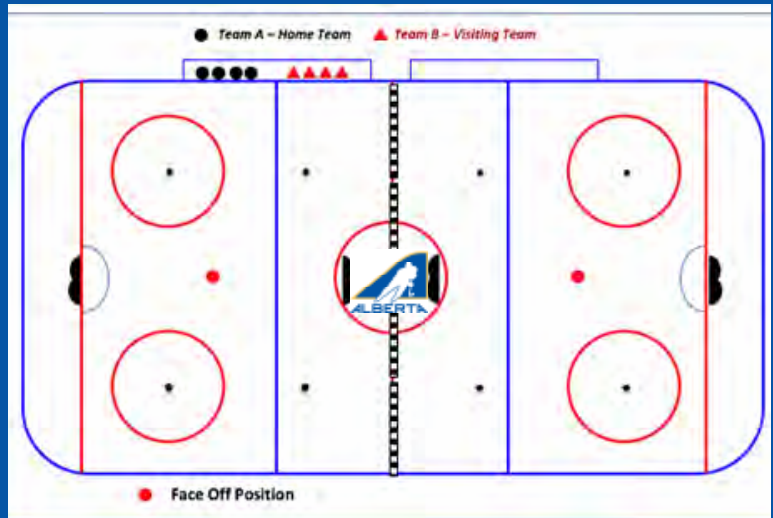


FIGURE 3: LOCATION OF FACEOFF DOT

PENALTIES (U9 ONLY)

PENALTIES SHALL BE CALLED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE HOCKEY CANADA OFFICIATING PROGRAM (HCOP) STANDARD OF PLAY, WITHIN AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE NEW OFFICIALS ARE LEARNING THE APPLICATION OF THE RULES.

Please note:

- Incidental contact may happen, but body checking is not permitted.
- There is no centre ice (red) line, and therefore no icing.
- There are no blue lines in play, therefore no offsides.

Minor penalties are noted by the official raising their arm to indicate a penalty will be assessed and making the penalty signal. At the end of the shift, the official notifies the coach about the infraction and the number of the offending player.

- If the offending team controls the puck after the infraction, the official blows the whistle and calls for a change of possession and the non-offending team is given room to play the puck (3-metre cushion).
- If the non-offending team has the puck, the penalty is placed on delay with the official raising their arm and when the offending team touches the puck the official will blow the whistle and make the penalty signal.
- The offending player who received the penalty is required to sit out their next shift, but the team will play even strength (4 on 4).

Should an infraction occur that would normally require a player to be ejected from the game (e.g. Game Misconduct, Match Penalty or Gross Misconduct), then the player will be removed from the remainder of that game and the official will be required to fill out an official's report documenting the incident.

FAQ - INTRO TO HOCKEY HALF-ICE HOCKEY

01

ARE TEAMS PERMITTED TO IDENTIFY A FULL-TIME GOALTENDER?

All players should have an opportunity to play goal and all players should rotate through the goalie position throughout the season. The Hockey Canada Long Term Player Development philosophy encourages a wide range of skill development at a young age and focusing on a single position will limit a child's opportunity to practice skills in all areas.

02

IS THERE A NEED TO DRAW A CREASE IN FOR THE NET SITUATED IN THE NEUTRAL ZONE?

No. Each net should be placed just inside the centre circle which will provide a small marking to aid the goaltender with positioning in front of the net. The centre circle line will be used as the goal line for the neutral zone net.

03

WHAT ARE THE DIMENSIONS OF A HALF-ICE HOCKEY GAME?

The average dimensions of a regular ice surface in Canada are 200 feet by 85 feet. The half-ice playing surface can be a maximum of 100' by 85' if the dividers are placed at the centre red line. In a study conducted by Hockey Alberta, the half-ice playing surface illustrated the same stride distance for a child as relative to the full sheet of ice for an adult.

04

IS IT A REQUIREMENT TO USE A BLUE PUCK AND WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES?

It is a recommendation to use a Blue Puck for all Intro to Hockey programming. The regulation Black Puck weighs 6 ounces. The Blue Puck weighs 4 ounces. Scaling down all aspects of practice and game play for players 8 and under is very beneficial. The blue puck is an appropriate weight in relation to the height and weight of these young players. Use of the Blue puck will promote proper mechanics in shooting, passing, and carrying the puck.

05

HOW DOES THE OFFICIAL OR COACH KEEP THE GAME GOING WHEN A PUCK GOES OUT OF PLAY?

Officials and Coaches are encouraged to keep additional pucks in their pockets for when a puck is shot out of play. The official will provide a new puck to the non-offending team and play will resume.

FAQ - INTRO TO HOCKEY

U9 FULL-ICE HOCKEY

01

IF A TEAM SCORES A GOAL, DO THEY FACE-OFF FROM CENTRE ICE?

No, the team that scored will back off to the blue line and the referee will place the puck behind the net and the other team will start from there. The defending team must wait until the puck gets to the top of the circles before they can go after the puck.

02

DOES THE PLAYER THAT RECEIVES A PENALTY HAVE TO OFF IMMEDIATELY OR AT THE COMPLETION OF THEIR SHIFT?

The player that receives a penalty will be sent off immediately after the call is made by the referee and must miss the next shift.

03

IF A TEAM ICES THE PUCK, DOES THE FACE-OFF COME BACK TO THEIR END?

There will be NO face-off. The team that iced the puck must remain outside the opposing blue line and the other team will bring the puck out. The defending team will have to wait until the offensive team brings the puck above the top of the circles before they can go after the puck.

04

HOW DO I OBTAIN A SANCTION TO HOST A ONE-TIME EVENT UNDER THE U9 PROJECT?

Please contact your local association, provide them the details of the game (date, location, opponent, etc... and your association will make the appropriate sanction request to Hockey Alberta through the Centre Ice Portal. The request will be reviewed by a Minor Discipline Coordinator and, if approved, an email generated with the sanction number.

05

IF MY TEAM PARTICIPATES IN A LEAGUE, WILL LEAGUE GAMES BE ELIGIBLE UNDER THE U9 PROJECT?

No, Leagues will continue to host all scheduled games following the Intro to Hockey Model with half-ice games.

06

WHAT IF I HAVE A SCHEDULED LEAGUE GAME, BUT I WANT TO PLAY A ONE-TIME EVENT UNDER THE U9, WILL I BE ALLOWED?

No, all scheduled League games will take priority over any one-time event/exhibition games played under the U9 Project. Failure to fulfill your League obligations will result in possible discipline, fines and loss of sanctioning privileges with Hockey Alberta to host one-time event/exhibition games under the U9 Project.



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