



# HOCKEY CANADA

## CANADIAN PLAYER PATHWAY

# U7 (Initiation) Player Pathway Policy

2020-2021 Season





# ***Section 2:*** ***U7 Policy and Recommendations***

DRAFT





# Hockey Canada Policy for U7 Hockey

## Playing Surface – Cross-Ice

- The maximum size of the ice surface is 100 feet by 60 feet (100x60).
- U7 games will be played cross-ice for the entire season.

## Cross-Ice Game Play Rules

- Hockey Canada Playing Rules are followed except as stated below.
- 4-on-4 (Plus a Goaltender) – A player may play goal, but full goaltender equipment is not required.
- Game format: two periods with a run-time clock.
- Game length: not to exceed 60 minutes.
- Timed buzzer or whistle for line changes:
  - Game does not stop; players change on the fly at buzzer/whistle.
    - If there are fewer than four players on the bench, the active player designated to stay out for the following shift must return to the bench prior to continuing play.
    - On the buzzer/whistle, players must relinquish control of the puck immediately and vacate the ice. The new players enter the ice immediately.
    - Failure to immediately relinquish control of the puck or new players entering the ice surface prematurely may result in a penalty (see below). When play is stopped due to the goaltender freezing the puck or a goal being scored, the official will signal the attacking players to back off three metres. Once the attackers have moved back, the players may resume play as soon as the possession team has control of the puck. In the event a puck goes out of play, the official will provide a new puck to the non-offending team and the offending team will be required to provide a three-metre cushion.
- Shift length not to exceed two minutes.
- Face-offs to start each half.
- Change of possession:
  - Continuous play; when whistles lead to a change in puck possession, the official (coach) will signal the attacking players to back off three metres. Once the attackers have moved back, play may resume as soon as the possession team has control of the puck.
  - Goaltender freezes the puck – the official (coach) blows the whistle to indicate the attacking team backs off and the defending team gets possession.
  - Puck shot out of play – the offending team backs off and the official (coach) gives the non-offending team a new puck.
- One official per game. (coaches may also act as official for games) (RECOMMENDATION)
- Goaltenders do not need full equipment. (RECOMMENDATION)
- No score is kept.
- No standings or stats kept.
- Blue puck (4 oz) (RECOMMENDATION)
- Net size – 2x3, 3x4 or 4x6. (ALL ARE ACCEPTABLE)
- Penalties:



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## *U7 Player Pathway*



- Player sits next shift, game is played 4-on-4 and if offending team controls the puck after the infraction, official blows the whistle and calls for change of possession.
- Minor penalties are noted, with the official (coach) briefly raising their arm to indicate a penalty will be assessed. At the conclusion of the shift, the official (coach) notifies the coach of the infraction and the number of the offending player.
- If the offending team controls the puck after the infraction, the official (coach) blows the whistle and calls for a change of possession; the non-offending team is given room to play the puck (three-metre cushion).
- The offending player will sit out the next shift, but the team will play even strength.
- Should an infraction occur that would normally require a player to be ejected from the game (game misconduct, match penalty or gross misconduct), the player will be removed for the remainder of that game. Even under these circumstances, teams will not play shorthanded and no game incident report will be required.

### Player Evaluation / Selection / Tryouts

- **(REQUIREMENT)** No player evaluation / selection / tryouts prior to or during the first week of school.
  - No player evaluation / selection / tryouts during the off-season phase (previous season, including March through August).
  - No player evaluation / selection / tryouts during the first week of school where school starts the week after Labour Day.
  - Where school starts prior to Labour Day, there must be four skates/practices starting the week following Labour Day before player evaluation / selection / tryouts commence.
- **(REQUIREMENT)** Must have a minimum of four practices/skill sessions prior to formal player evaluation / selection / tryouts starting.
- **(REQUIREMENT)** Must have a minimum of three formal player evaluation / selection / tryouts sessions.
  - **(RECOMMENDATION)** – one skills session, one small-area games session, one half ice game

### Development Phase

- **(REQUIREMENT)** Must be a period of development time following team selection and prior to the start of the regular season.

### Fair and Equal Ice Time

- **(REQUIREMENT)** Fair and equal ice time is designed to ensure that all players get the same opportunity to contribute to the outcome of games, regardless of skill or ability. A coach's responsibility is to develop all players to contribute. Shortening of the bench in an attempt to win games is not permitted. All players and goaltenders should receive fair and as close to equal as possible ice time.
- Recommendations for positional rotation:
  - **(RECOMMENDATION)** All players play all positions – forward / defence / goaltender
  - **(RECOMMENDATION)** All players get a chance to start the game and start the second half.
- Goaltender rotation:
  - **(REQUIREMENT)** No full-time goaltenders.
  - **(RECOMMENDATION)** All players get a chance to play goal.
  - Players can play goal during practices and games with no goaltending equipment required.

## Playoffs

- **(REQUIREMENT)** There are no playoffs in U7 hockey

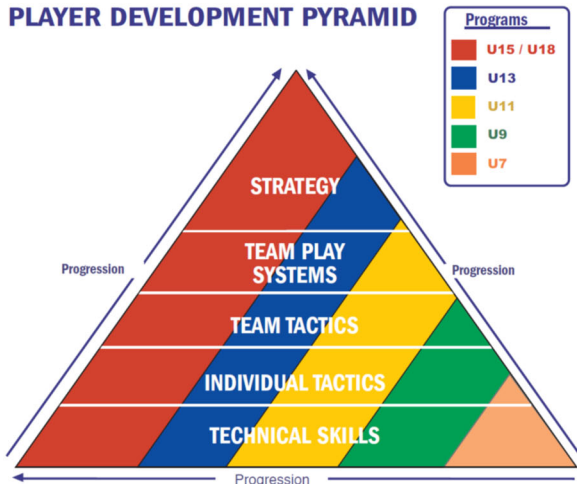
## Seasonal Structure

- Preparation phase
  - See Player Evaluation / Selection / Tryouts above.
- Development phase
  - Teams must have a period of development time following Player evaluation / selection / tryouts prior to the start of the regular season.
- Development and regular season phase
  - Recommended maximum of 25 games per year (including exhibition, league, tournaments)
  - Recommended Seasonal breaks
    - Season should allow for two seasonal breaks (not including Christmas/long weekends)
    - Seasonal break would be a minimum five days without a scheduled game or mandatory practice.
- Tournaments are jamboree format
  - A jamboree is designed to engage players in a fun environment; it is the coming together of several players who are then placed onto teams. Games may or may not be competitive and the emphasis is on fun and fair play.
  - A festival is designed to engage players in a fun environment: it is the coming together of teams to participate in games and fun activities. Games may be competitive but no standings are kept.
- Off Season Phase
  - Recommend limited skills-based on ice training making more time for multisport activity

## Position-Specific Training

- Small-area games in practice / station-based practices / skill-focused drills
- Only 15% of practice time should be spent on team tactics with 85% of practice time spent on skills
- Basic positional play and rules of the game can be introduced at the end of the season or prior to the start of the U11 regular season. Basic defensive-zone positioning, offside, icing, etc., can be introduced during the ice sessions prior to tryouts or after teams are selected.

### PLAYER DEVELOPMENT PYRAMID





## ***Section 3: Rationale for U7 Programming***

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## Benefits of Cross-Ice Hockey

At times, there can be concerns from parents about how small-area games may impact their child's hockey development, but we ask parents to trust the development experts. It is also important to remind parents that putting young players into a competitive environment too early will compromise their development. Children need to be placed into competitive situations that suit their age-appropriate abilities and parents need to be realistic about what children should be able to do all age levels. This is why Hockey Canada's long-term player development strategy is so important.

It is important to fully understand and appreciate the benefits of cross-ice hockey. The configuration of dividing the playing surface into cross-ice is a decision that has been made in consultation with experts in athlete development.

An overview of very simple statistics illustrates a number of advantages to the smaller-surface games model:

- Increases the emphasis on skating skills, including elements like agility, balance, coordination and quickness.
- Number of puck battles increases.
- Puck control and puck protection skills are enhanced, which will help players succeed at higher levels.
- Fundamentals of skating, puck control, passing and shooting are reinforced at a greater rate.
- Increase in incidental body contact requires players to play with their head up, preparing players for proper use of body contact and checking skills in the future.
- Less time and space increase the frequency of making hockey decisions.
- Better environment for teaching ice awareness and boosts hockey sense.
- Over time, the intensity level of competition increases with the progressive skill development of players.

***“You have to be able to make plays in pretty small areas.  
The more you practice in small spaces the better off you are.”***  
***Sidney Crosby, Canada's National Men's Team***

***“You need to be able to make quick passes and have quick  
communication. Small area games are important.”***  
***Brianne Jenner, Canada's National Women's Team***

## Long-Term Player Development Model

Research has proven that putting young players into a competitive environment too early will compromise their development. Children should only be placed into competitive situations that suit their skill level and abilities.

It is important to fully understand and appreciate the benefits of cross-ice and half-ice hockey and why Hockey Canada has a national policy ensuring all U7 hockey is played in smaller, modified spaces.

An illustration of very simple statistics shows the advantages to the smaller-surface games model.

### PUCK TOUCHES

2x CROSS-ICE / HALF-ICE  
FULL-ICE



Small spaces equate to more engagement in the play.

All players are close to the play at all times and have much more opportunity for puck touches. Regardless of the skill level or the ability of each player, their opportunities to be engaged in the play are doubled when the playing area is smaller.

### SHOT ATTEMPTS

6x CROSS-ICE / HALF-ICE  
FULL-ICE



A very large difference between full-ice and small areas.

There are six times as many shots at goal in a cross-ice or half-ice game, because players are closer to the puck at all times and the puck finds its way to the net much more often.

### SHOTS ON GOAL

3x CROSS-ICE / HALF-ICE  
FULL-ICE



Shrinking the playing surface increases offence.

Players are much closer to the net, skate shorter distance from goal to goal and have increased opportunities for offensive play.

### PASS ATTEMPTS

2x CROSS-ICE / HALF-ICE  
FULL-ICE



More of a team game is apparent.

Players are observed passing and attempting to pass the puck more often. This is for two reasons:

1. All players are close enough to pressure the puck more frequently.
2. Teammates are in close support of the puck carrier at all times.

### PASSES RECEIVED

5x CROSS-ICE  
FULL-ICE



Short, quick passes find their mark.

In smaller spaces, more passes are attempted and most of these passes are five to 10 feet in length. When passes are shorter, accuracy improves, and players have more success receiving the pass. Players also start to understand the importance of team puck possession.





## U7 Player Pathway – Rationale

Dr. Stephen Norris has consulted with Hockey Canada in the areas of Player Development and Performance Programming for a number of years. Dr. Norris has also played a key role as a consultant to the 'Own the Podium' program high performance/technical groups leading up to a number of Winter Olympic Games. He was one of the five founding members and contributors to the 'Canadian Sport for Life' movement focusing on athlete/participant development and supported Hockey Canada in the design of the Hockey Canada Long Term Player Development model and the Canadian Player Pathways model.

In each area of the policy's requirements outlined below, rationale has been provided and has been supplemented by Dr. Norris in the shaded areas.

### **Tryouts cannot be scheduled prior to the start of the school year. (REQUIREMENT)**

- Give minor hockey associations and parents back the summer – the season does not need to start this early only to be finished at the end of January or early in February (start later and end later).
- Give minor hockey associations a chance to get organized and begin planning.
- The start of school year can be very stressful for young players, and they do not need to add hockey tryouts starting at the same time as the school year.

*There are very serious considerations that need to be addressed here. First, the notion of tryouts taking place weeks, if not months in advance of the actual season for this age group makes very little sense due to the realities of child development during these periods.*

*The summer months are a time where youngsters not only consolidate previous experiences, but also advance their competency due to aspects such as recovery from earlier specificity, demonstrate adaptation of all previous experiences to new situations and activities over the summer months, and reveal growth and development opportunities that occur naturally – physical, psychological, cognitive, motor development, social, etc.*

*Second, everyone should understand that the return-to-school period (both the couple of weeks before, the week of and the 'wash-in period' until the student is settled back into the routine) is an extremely stressful period in terms of the biological impact upon the student.*

### **Must have minimum of four practices and/or skill sessions prior to formal tryouts starting. (REQUIREMENT)**

- A player's first experience in the new hockey season should not be a formal tryout – this gives all players the opportunity to get back on the ice in a more 'player-friendly' scenario.
- Help level the playing field; not all players have a chance to go to hockey schools or prep camps prior to the start of the season.
- Provide minor hockey associations the opportunity to run their own prep camp instead of members spending money outside the association.



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*There is a great benefit for children to be offered the opportunity to participate in four ice sessions prior to formal selection or evaluation. Players feel both more relaxed and are able to perform at a better skill level following four ice sessions, rather than the alternative of being evaluated in their first time back on the ice. By providing these opportunities, players are now in situation where stress has been mitigated and they are able to showcase their ability on the ice.*

**Tryouts must be minimum of three formal tryout sessions. Recommendation is one skills session, one small-area games session and one formal game. (REQUIREMENT)**

- Players need a fair chance to be evaluated – a standardized process will show transparency, fairness and consistency.
- Provide coaches with the foundation for a development plan based on a solid and quantifiable evaluation.

*This follows the previous point of providing ALL young players with the opportunity to re-engage with the hockey. For example, it would be unacceptable for a school in the first week of September to give children an exam that they must pass, or else the child would not be permitted to take that subject during the school year. This would be unacceptable to parents, yet this is the impact of tryouts early in the process before anything is taught.*

**Must have a period of development time following team selection and prior to the start of the regular season. (REQUIREMENT)**

- It is very important to provide coaches with the opportunity to develop and improve their players skills prior to getting into organized games.
- The progression should be skills before tactics and tactics before systems.
- This will eliminate or reduce pressure and or focus on winning.

*As outlined above, professional and/or knowledgeable individuals wishing to provide positive developmental experiences for children or youth would reinforce the need for an instructional or practice component prior to the start of the season. With the implementation of this policy, we are moving forward to not only accept, but welcome development opportunities for the betterment of players.*