



2025/2026 U9 Guidelines

Introduction

PCAHA is continuing a U9 Full Ice pilot program for the 2025/2026 season.

The first years of hockey need to be a positive experience. A fun and exciting start gives young players the opportunity to enjoy hockey for life!



U7 and U9 hockey should be delivered through a progressive, learn-to-play teaching curriculum. Children learn best through practice drills and skill sessions, as well as informal games such as shinny, freeze tag and obstacle courses.

The skills of skating, puck control, passing and shooting are introduced and refined one step at a time. The focus should always be on fun and skill development, but the early years of hockey should also allow youngsters to experience fitness, fair play, and cooperation.

Hockey Canada wants every Canadian youngster to have the opportunity to participate in and benefit from a program designed to meet their specific needs, one that ensures progressive skill development through well-delivered practice sessions and age-appropriate game play in an environment suited to their skill level.

U9 hockey serves as the foundation upon which the entire hockey experience is built. It is a crucial piece in building the skills of players at every level – players benefit from getting the ‘right start’ in the game.

Rationale for Combining Age Groups

The Hockey Canada model combines seven- and eight-year-old players in U9.

Hockey Canada recommends that like skilled players be grouped together. The development philosophy is to maximize puck touches by all players. When there is a large disparity in skill and competitive ability, less skilled players do not touch the puck with the same frequency as more skilled players. Hockey Canada groups U8/U9 together for the development pathway as it stresses a skills-based development model as opposed to an age-based model.



Minor and Major

Two development streams will exist – U9 Minor (more developing) and U9 Major (more proficient)

Each MHA will determine the number of U9 Minor (more developing) and U9 Major (more proficient) teams they will ice each season, considering the table below. The table recommends the number of teams in both Minor and Major based on the total number of teams an association will ice. All teams within each development stream must be balanced as per PCAHA rules.

Total # of U9 Teams within MHA	Min. # of Major Teams Declared
2 to 4	1
5 to 7	2
8 to 10	3
11 to 12	4
14 to 17	5

Team Formation Phases

The suggested team formation phases are as follows:

1. Rust removal sessions (2 minimum)
2. Evaluation skills/compete sessions and scrimmages with balanced groups (2 minimum)
3. Evaluation games with skill-based groups (2 minimum)
4. Formation of preliminary teams (minor/major)
5. Balancing games within each stream
6. Teams finalized

Team Balancing

All teams shall be formed within the Major or Minor streams in accordance with Section R of the PCAHA Rule Book:

An Association forming teams for house league play and/or inter-Association play shall divide all players within each of U7 and U9 into two streams, “developing” and “proficient”. Each Association shall determine the number of “developing” and “proficient” teams within each of U7 and U9. Teams within each stream shall be equally balanced prior to commencing inter-Association play. “Equally balanced teams” shall mean teams which are balanced on the basis of the skill levels of the players and competitive strength..

Associations having multiple teams in a stream (Major or Minor) must balance those teams.

Roster Size

The desired roster size is 14-16 players (full ice)

Game Play Guidelines (2025/26 ONLY)

U9 may play full-ice games within their Association from October 15th until November 30th. Inter-Association exhibition or league games may be organized starting December 1st.

For Associations only registering one U9 team in a stream, inter-Association exhibition games may be arranged with another Association in that stream prior to December 1st, with the approval of the applicable Managing Director.

U9 Major

- No score shall be kept in games
- Smaller nets are encouraged until January 15th
- The 2-minute buzzer will not be used
- Icings and offsides will be called
- Referees will be used, coaches, players and referees will work together to expedite game play as much as possible.
- Penalties will be called; the offending player will return to their bench for an approximate 2-minute “time out” from playing and will be replaced on the ice by another player
- Games not to exceed 75 minute time slot
- All players have opportunity to play all positions – forward/defence/goaltender
- Coaches must do their utmost to accommodate players interested in the goaltender position regardless of how this will impact the team’s competitive play
- Players are to split time evenly between forward and defence throughout the season
- Fair and as close to equal ice time as possible, shortening of the bench is not permitted

U9 Minor

- No score shall be kept in games
- Smaller nets are recommended until at least January 15th
- A 2-minute buzzer will be used until January 15th. Teams may opt to phase the buzzer out after January 15th
- Shifts should alternate between more developing and more proficient players to enable like skilled players to be grouped together, this will require cooperation and communication between the coaches of the two teams
- Icings and offsides will be called
- Referees will be used, coaches, players and referees will work together to expedite game play as much as possible
- Penalties will be called; the offending player will return to their bench for an approximate 2-minute “time out” from playing and will be replaced on the ice by another player
- Games not to exceed 75 minute time slot
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Tournament/Jamborees

The playing of Tournaments/Jamborees is an important part of culture, team building and the fun of hockey playing experience. PCAHA and Hockey Canada encourage teams and associations to continue to operate and attend these events while staying within the “Maximum Game” guidelines as presented.

During the 2025/26 pilot, full ice tournaments at U9 are for PCAHA teams only.

If hosting or operating a tournament please ensure that no score is kept, and therefore no winners or losers are determined throughout the event. In other words, a traditional 4 team event with the top 2 teams playing in the final is not permitted.

HC recommendations are as follows:

- 4 team tournament - 3 game event – each team plays each team once.
5 team tournament - 4 game event – each team plays each team once.
- Entire schedule must be completed in advance of the start of the tournament.
- Tournaments and Jamborees should state if the tournament is for U9 Major or Minor teams.

Hockey Canada Pathways

For further information about the U9 pathways along with an FAQ, please refer to the Hockey Canada website:

[U9 Hockey Canada Pathway](#)