



**Under-9  
Half-Ice Guidelines  
2021 - 2022**

## Under-9 Half-Ice Guidelines

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## Introduction

All players in the Under-9 (formerly Novice) age category (7-8 yrs) will play on a half-ice surface for the duration of the season. This continues Hockey Manitoba's U9 half-ice program originally developed in 2017 - 2018. U9 half-ice hockey has now been mandated across the country by Hockey Canada. Minor Hockey Association volunteers and administrators are encouraged to review this document carefully, which incorporates concepts and non-negotiables from Hockey Canada's guidelines as well as specific guidelines created by Hockey Manitoba. **All Minor Hockey Associations and leagues in Manitoba are required to follow Hockey Manitoba's U9 half-ice guidelines.**

Hockey in Canada is a passion. Simply put. Every person has a view and an opinion on our game. We all want our sons, daughters, grandkids, and anyone playing hockey to enjoy the experience. Hockey Manitoba certainly respects that and shares in the sentiment. Our goal is to make the experience positive for all members in our organization. It is also our responsibility to be on the leading edge of changes and improvements and bring those changes to our programs. We want our sport to stay on the front edge of change and a modified ice surface that is appropriate for players is the right thing to do.

Hockey is amongst one of the last sports to consider "area of play" modifications. With Sport Canada's focus on the long-term development of athletes we have been exposed to the modification of many of the other major sports in Canada. Picture this: A 7-year-old soccer player playing on a World Cup field. Or an 8-year-old baseball player standing at home plate with a pitcher 60 feet, 6 inches away at Winnipeg Goldeyes Field. A basketball court with 10-foot baskets. A 7-year-old on the goal line looking to the other end at Investor's Group Field. Placing our 7 and 8-year-old players on an ice surface similar or equivalent to what players in the NHL play on is a disadvantage to our athletes. Our collective focus is to create an age appropriate, healthy environment where all players can develop skills and have fun as they grow in our game.

We believe these modifications will benefit every participant and we will support our players, coaches, officials, and administrators with a well structured program. We ask everyone to approach this continued change with an open mind and support our direction in a positive manner to allow our players to learn the game in this exciting progressive direction.

## Rationale

Players at the U9 level require a continued focus on physical literacy while also beginning to develop some of the more advanced individual skills inherent in the game. By moving from cross-ice at U7 (formerly Initiation) to half-ice at U9 we increase the size of the ice surface in accordance with the increase in the size of player. This modified ice will continue to provide players with an environment that is more inclusive, competitive and conducive to skill development through puck touches and puck control, shots, passes completed, transitions, decision making, puck support, overall involvement...and FUN!

***The following U9 half-ice guidelines have been developed to assist our Minor Hockey Associations and Community Clubs with the implementation of half-ice hockey in this age category. This will ensure a consistent, organized delivery model across the province. Information on Hockey Canada's U9 Guidelines can be found on Hockey Manitoba's website, however please note HOCKEY MANITOBA HAS MADE SOME MODIFICATIONS which are outlined in this document.***

## Scheduling

Minor Hockey Associations and leagues are strongly encouraged to schedule U9 half-ice games in succession whenever possible to allow for fluid transition between games. Ideally this group of U9 half-ice games would also follow a group of U7 cross-ice games to limit the movement of rink dividers.

## Practices

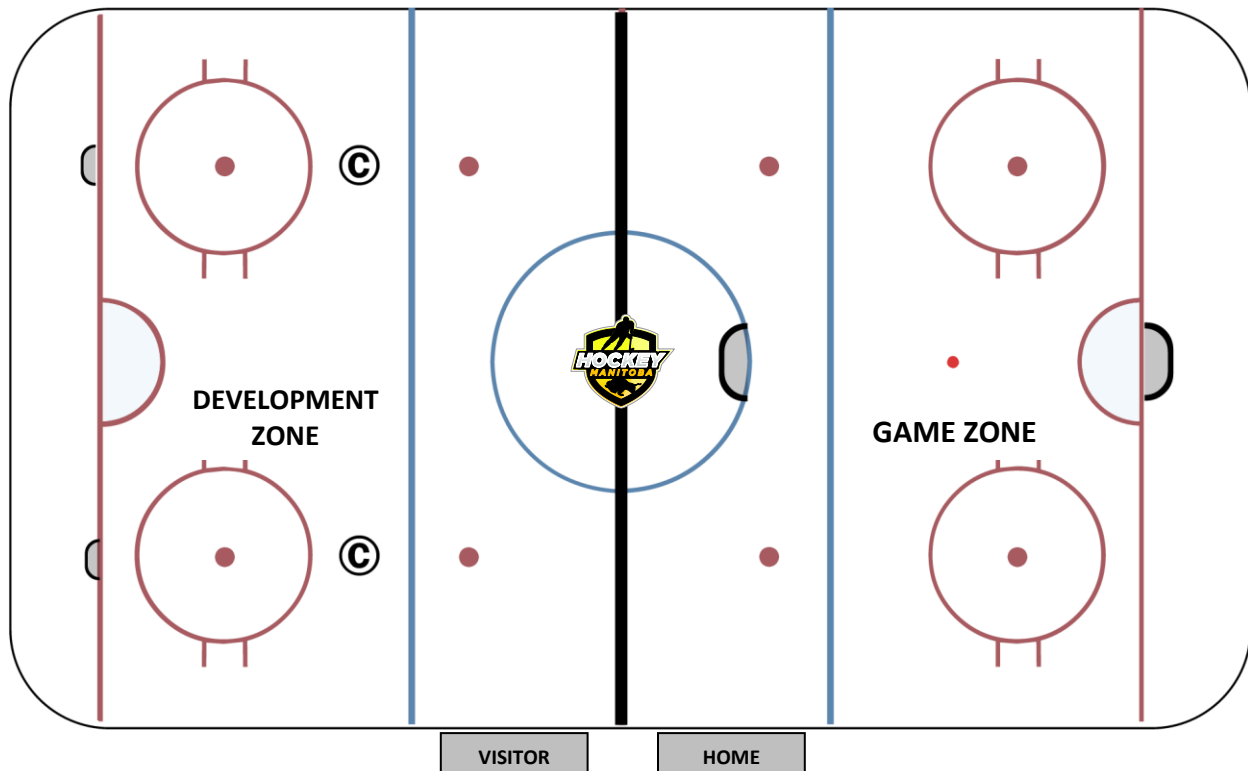
To maintain the concepts of long-term player development and modified ice, practices at the U9 level should be on half-ice whenever possible. This allows for the focus to be on skill development and competitive games in small, modified spaces rather than full-ice flow drills or team tactics. In addition, this will save your team/association money!

## Roster size

Although Hockey Manitoba understands there are challenges in consistent roster sizes across the branch, when possible team rosters should consist of 12 skaters plus one (1) rotating goalie. This ensures utilization of the Development Zone and equal and adequate rest time for all players. A minimum of 10 skaters is recommended.

## Equipment & set-up

- One rink divider across the centre red line (or set of boards)
- Two full size (6' x 4') or junior size (4' x 3') nets in Game Zone
- Two mini nets (3' x 2') utilized in Development Zone (can also be junior or full size)



## Warm-up

A three-minute warm up will take place prior to each game, and will begin once set up for the half-ice game is complete. The home team will utilize the Game Zone for its warm-up, the visiting team will utilize the Development Zone.

## Basic rules

These are basic rules regarding the format and structure for U9 half-ice games:

- Teams use their own bench for the duration of the half-ice game (if agreed, teams may share one bench)
- The half-ice game will be played 4 vs. 4 (skaters) and 1 goalie from each team
- Games are 2 x 24-minute periods (teams switch ends after 1st period)
- The visiting team defends the net on the centre red line in the 1st period
- Officials will draw a dot in the middle of the Game Zone for all face-offs
- Each team has 8 players in the Game Zone at all times (4 on the ice, 4 on the bench)
- The remaining players are in the Development Zone
- Shifts are 2 minutes, running time; continuous play within each shift (see below)
- Buzzer sounds once at the end of each 2-minute shift, however clock continues to run
- A face-off will take place at the start of every shift
- After a 4-shift segment (8 minutes), clock is stopped and buzzer is sounded to signify player rotations
- Each team rotates new players into the Development Zone for the next segment
- There are NO icing or offside calls
- Score will be kept, however goals and assists will not be recorded
- Goalies may only be pulled in the last shift of any game
- Players and coaches shake hands after the game

## Continuous play & change of possession

As identified by Hockey Canada as a core element at the U9 category, one of the keys to improving the flow of each game and reducing stoppages is to create continuous play, particularly on change of possession. These basic rules apply:

- There will be no face-offs or lengthy stoppages in play during shifts; continuous play will be used (exception; injury)
- Puck shot out of play: Official blows whistle, offending team backs off and non-offending team gets possession
- Goalie freezes puck: Official blows whistle, attacking team backs off and defending team gets possession
- Goal scored: Official blows whistle, attacking team backs off and defending team gets possession

**Note:** In all cases, "backing off" will require the offensive team to move back to the ringette line (or top of circles). The defensive team must wait for the official to indicate they can begin their attack and must start with the puck on or behind their goal line. Both teams resume play on the officials' signal.

Coaches should ensure that all players understand this concept from both the offensive and defensive perspective.

## Penalties

The following guidelines apply to minor penalties during U9 half-ice games:

- Standard delayed penalty procedures are followed (note: goalie can't be pulled during delay)
- The official calling the penalty blows whistle, identifies offending player and penalty
- Offending player is escorted to player bench by the official who called the penalty
- The 2nd official gives possession to the non-offending team (offending team must back off)
- The offending player is eligible to return during the same shift if a goal is scored by the non-offending team

## Game outline

The following is an outline of a standard half-ice game:

PERIOD 1		PERIOD 2	
<i>Time</i>	<i>Shift</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Shift</i>
24:00	1	24:00	13
22:00	2	22:00	14
20:00	3	20:00	15
18:00	4	18:00	16
<i>ROTATION AT 16:00</i>		<i>ROTATION AT 16:00</i>	
16:00	5	16:00	17
14:00	6	14:00	18
12:00	7	12:00	19
10:00	8	10:00	20
<i>ROTATION AT 8:00</i>		<i>ROTATION AT 8:00</i>	
8:00	9	8:00	21
6:00	10	6:00	22
4:00	11	4:00	23
2:00	12	2:00	24
<i>ROTATION AT 0:00</i>		<i>END OF GAME</i>	



## Development zone

The purpose of the Development Zone is to maximize ice usage, while providing additional age-appropriate skill development using drills and competitive game opportunities for players. It also provides on-ice coaches (1 from each team) teaching, instructional and mentorship opportunities. Use of the Development Zone will create approx. 30-40% more ice time for players compared to traditional formats. Basic rules for the Development Zone are:

- Use of the Development Zone is MANDATORY during all exhibition, regular season and playoff games
- With 8 skaters in the Game Zone at all times, the remaining skaters will be in the Development Zone
- Development Zone will focus on both skill development (drills) and competition (small area games)
- One coach from each team is required to be on the ice (coaches should be rotated from game to game)
- Each Development Zone "segment" will be 8 minutes in length
- Mini nets are recommended for use, however full-sized nets can be used
- The number of players in the Development Zone will vary, depending on each team's numbers

If coaches are not available, regions, leagues and/or associations may train appropriate aged players (must be registered members of Hockey Manitoba) to run Development Zone activities (Under-15 or Under-18 players for example). However, these players should understand the appropriate concepts being taught and given adequate support to ensure safety and productivity in the Development Zone.

## Player rotations

Players will rotate between the Game Zone and Development Zone after each 8-minute segment. The timekeeper will sound the buzzer at the end of each 8-minute segment to identify rotations. There are 8 players in the Game Zone at all times (4 on the ice, 4 on the bench), and the additional players will be in the Development Zone. Coaches simply rotate new players into the Development Zone after each 8-minute segment. This rotation MUST be done fairly to ensure all players receive as equal time in the Game Zone and Development Zone as possible for every game.

- Team with 10 skaters = 2 players in Development Zone
- Team with 11 skaters = 3 players in Development Zone
- Team with 12 skaters = 4 players in Development Zone

Note: Teams that have less than 10 or more than 12 skaters at any game can determine the appropriate method of utilizing the Development Zone in accordance with their Minor Hockey Association.

Coaches should meet before each game to discuss equal ability line combinations. For example, both teams could ensure their more developed players are on the ice for the 1st and 3rd shift, and the less developed players are on the ice for the 2nd and 4th shift for each segment (or vice versa).

## Officials

The half-ice game will be run by two (2) officials who will be responsible for face-offs, goal determination, penalties, etc. while working on fundamentals such as skating, positioning and communication. This will assist young officials in building confidence and experience, reacting "with" the play rather than "to" it, while creating a foundation to take with them into full-ice games at the U11 level and beyond. Hockey Manitoba includes officials' half-ice procedures at all Level 1 officiating clinics, which will also be circulated to all Minor Hockey Associations. Officials will continue to learn about offside, icing and other full-ice rules at their clinics.

*Please be supportive and respectful to our young officials!*

## Tournament play

Hockey Manitoba will allow certain modifications to its U9 half-ice program for sanctioned tournaments, at the discretion of the tournament organizer. All half-ice game rules will apply; however the Development Zone will be optional. Options for U9 tournament play are as follows:

- Standard half-ice game, use of Development Zone (2 teams)
- Standard half-ice game, no use of Development Zone (2 teams)
- 2 half-ice games simultaneously (4 teams)

Note: Teams will be required to share benches if running 2 half-ice games simultaneously.

## Transition season

Hockey Manitoba recognizes that it may be beneficial for graduating U9 players (8 year olds) to be introduced to the full-ice game prior to their first year of U11 hockey. The Transition Season will provide this opportunity and the ability for players learn some basic rules such as off-sides and icing, along with introductory positional play and face-offs.

Regulations and basic rules for the Transition Season are as follows:

- Games will be played on full-ice with standard Hockey Canada rules in affect
- All players must be 8 years old as of December 31, 2021 (no underage or overage players allowed)
- A "home center" and host association must be declared for registration purposes
- All players must have been registered and participated in the winter U9 program
- Players can only register and play with one Transition Season team
- The program is inclusive, therefore no "cuts" are allowed
- Teams must be rostered in accordance with Hockey Manitoba regulations (including coach certification)
- Teams may only play in Hockey Canada or USA Hockey sanctioned activities
- There can be no on-ice activity until the regular season (including playoffs) is completed for all players
- The Transition Season can operate from March 1st (earliest) until April 30th
- Associations must submit a fee of \$50 plus GST for each Transition Season team to Hockey Manitoba
- All other fees, schedules, ice times, etc. are at the discretion of the Association and/or Region

**The Transition Season is an OPTIONAL program; Regions and/or Associations will make this decision.**



## Growth & development FAQs

### ***Why are there so many recent changes to the U9 Program?***

Hockey Manitoba has extensively reviewed its U9 half-ice program from inception in 2017 - 2018 and into the 2021 - 2022 season. Hockey Canada has now made half-ice mandatory across the country, and Hockey Manitoba has incorporated key concepts from the national model in addition to some modifications for the benefit of player development. We believe our model utilizes the best components of each - with a focus on development and engagement at its core - while also ensuring we recognize Hockey Canada's core elements at this age level.

### ***Does my player regress by having to play half-ice at 7 or 8 years old?***

No, research shows that players benefit more (and have more fun) by playing in an age-appropriate environment (half-ice). All players benefit from increased puck touches, scoring chances, quick transitions, read & react situations, puck support and passing plays in half-ice hockey. Physical literacy and skill acquisition are the cornerstones of development at this age. Learning game rules (offside, icing) will come in time.

### ***Some 8 year old players are very big; what about incidental contact and collisions?***

Incidental contact and collisions will always be part of the game and are unavoidable any time you have players around the puck, however the reduction in the playing area from full-ice to half-ice will force players to accelerate their thought process and reaction times. It should also be noted that Junior/NHL players, all of whom are much larger than U9 players, spend the majority of their time in either the defensive or offensive zones (smaller areas than that of our half-ice zone), so to think 7 & 8 year old development is going to be stunted rather than accelerated by playing on a reduced ice surface is inaccurate.

### ***With a reduced ice surface, won't this have a negative impact on skating development?***

Quite the opposite. Hockey is no longer a linear game and skating is much more than simply moving in a straight line. The reduction of the ice surface will again help to develop players complete skating skills which include stops and starts, transitions, turning, pivots, agility, edge work and balance. Good skaters will always be good skaters but playing in a half-ice concept will assist in the development of every player's skating acumen rather than primarily relying on or limiting their skating arsenal to full acceleration. In addition, a study conducted by Hockey Alberta found that young players can reach top speeds in a distance less than half of the ice, therefore we are confident that half-ice games will improve rather than handicap players' skating skills. Hockey Canada studies support this research.

### ***Won't there be increased whistles with the reduction of the ice surface, and pucks shot over the divider(s)?***

With the removal of off-sides and icings, and the modification to continuous play within shifts, there will essentially be no stoppages of play during games. The result is continuous, competitive play and engagement. Trials have shown that the amount of pucks shot over the divider(s) is very limited.

### ***Why has a 4 vs. 4 model been implemented, don't players need to learn positions?***

The 4 vs. 4 model follows Hockey Canada's core requirements for the U9 program, and was designed to maximize the opportunity to engage all players in the game. Age-appropriate training at the U9 level includes fundamental skill development and competition. Introductory concepts to positional play such as puck support are key in a 4 vs. 4 half-ice game, however learning specific positions, team tactics etc. are better introduced at older age levels.

For more information on Hockey Manitoba's U9 Program, visit <http://www.hockeymanitoba.ca>

