



## U7 / U9 Pathways

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### Introduction

PCAHA is excited to announce that starting in the 2023-2024 season it will be aligning with Hockey Canada's U7 and U9 Pathways. The rest of Canada is already following this model of having U6/7 and U8/9 combined.

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!

If a beginner has fun, develops basic skills, and builds confidence, there is a better chance they will enjoy playing the game of hockey. But if the early experience is unrewarding, they may never discover all that Canada's game has to offer.

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.

U7 and 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 five- and six-year-old players in the U7 division and seven- and eight-year-old players in U9. Each is prescribed a unique Player Pathway. These pathways recommend that like-skilled players be grouped together. The Pathway development philosophy aims to maximize puck touches by all players by using small area games and skill stations in practices, and a reduced ice surface size in games – this approach yields 2 times more puck touches, 6 times more shot attempts and 3 times as many shots on goal, twice as many pass attempts and 5 times more passes received than in full-ice practices and games.

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, less skilled players do not touch the puck with the same frequency as more skilled players. Hockey Canada groups U6/U7 and U8/U9 together for the development pathway as it stresses a skills-based development model as opposed to an age-based model.



## U7 and U9 Season Start-up

### Pre-Placement Skates

*Recommended minimum of four practices and/or skill sessions prior to formal player evaluation*

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A player's first experience in the new hockey season should not be a formal evaluation – this gives all players the opportunity to get back on the ice in a “player-friendly” scenario.

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. Each MHA is encouraged to run some shake-the-rust-out skates instead of members spending money outside the association. A minimum of four ice times are recommended prior to the initiation of any evaluation process.

### Player Placement Process

*Player placement skates should be a minimum of three sessions. Recommendation is one skills session, one small-area games session, and one cross-ice game for U7 and one half-ice game for U9.*

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Players need a chance to be evaluated – standardization means transparency, fairness, and consistency. Associations should provide coaches with the foundation for a solid and quantifiable evaluation.



## U7 / U9 Major and Minor Divisions

In both U7 and U9 two streams will exist in each age group.

- U7 Minor (development stream) / U7 Major (proficient stream)
- U9 Minor (development stream) / U9 Major (proficient stream)

Each MHA will make their own determination on the number of U7/U9 Major (proficient) and Minor (developing) teams they will ice each season. All teams within each division must be balanced as per PCAHA rules. Each MHA will determine the number of teams in both Major and Minor divisions based on their own internal Association requirements, number of players, ice availability, etc. An association may choose to ice teams in the Minor division only if it so chooses. Teams within a division must be balanced, however.

## Team Balancing

All players shall be rostered 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 equally balanced teams 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.*

In other words, associations having multiple teams in a category (Major or Minor) must balance their teams.

## Roster Size

The desired roster size is 18 players (range of 17 – 19) as per Hockey Canada guidelines.

## Game Play Guidelines

U7 may play cross-ice games within their Association from November 1st until Christmas. Inter-Association exhibition or league games may be organized starting January 1st.

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

U9 may play half-ice or cross-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 division, inter-Association exhibition games may be arranged with another Association in that division prior to December 1st, with the approval of the applicable Managing Director.



U7 and U9 will play two 4 vs 4 games with goalies simultaneously, therefore eight skaters and two goalies are always required on the ice. If the number of players available for a game warrant it, 3 vs 3 or 5 vs 5 may be permitted.

## **U9 Full-Ice Transition Guidelines**

U9 teams may transition to FULL ICE games after January 15th each season. This should be to a maximum of 12 games and one tournament or jamboree. No score shall be kept in these games.

## **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.

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 U7 / U9 Major or Minor teams.



## **Hockey Canada Pathways**

For further information about the U7 and U9 pathways along with an FAQ, please refer to the Hockey Canada website:

[U7 Hockey Canada Pathway](#)

[U9 Hockey Canada Pathway](#)