

VIAHA U9 & Under Policy

Purpose

This policy promotes a development-focused approach for U8/U9 hockey, prioritizing fun, skill-building and long-term growth. It serves as a valuable resource for coaches, volunteers, and parents.

Key Principles

- **Fun and Development Over Competition:** Focus on puck touches, shots, passes, and motor skills (agility, balance, coordination).
- **No Early Talent Identification:** Avoid labeling players; ensure equal opportunities for all athletes for as long as possible.
- **Balanced Teams:** Form teams by age and balance. Divide into "A" and "B" units for games to maximize development.
- **Small Area Game Emphasis:** Offers 2x puck touches, 6x shot attempts, 3x shots on goal, 2x pass attempts, 5x passes received.
- **Safe and Welcoming:** Promotes sportsmanship and safety. No playoffs, standings or stats.
- **Practice Over Games:** Ideal ratio 3:1 early season, 2:1 mid-season. Max 40 games/year including exhibition, league play and tournaments.

Team Formation

- Roster by age.
- Balance teams.
- Mixed U8/U9 teams are allowed with approval of the MHA president and the respective area VP.

Game Rules and Formats

Date	Teams	Action	Applicable Game Rules
December 1	U8 U9 Mixed U8/U9	May begin inter-association half-ice games	Half-Ice Game Rules
December 15	U9 ONLY	May begin full-ice games	Transitional Full-Ice Game Rules
January 15	Mixed U8/U9 with permission of MHA President	May begin full-ice games	Transitional Full-Ice Game Rules
February 1	U9 Mixed U8/U9 with permission of MHA President in consultation with applicable area VP	All full-ice games will switch to Full-Ice Game Rules	Full-Ice Game Rules

Coordinate referee assignments with Referee-in-Chief.

Half-Ice Game Rules

All U8, U9 and U8/U9 mixed teams may begin playing inter-association half-ice games on December 1.

U8 teams must only play half-ice games throughout the season.

U9 teams may choose to play half-ice games throughout the season.

Mixed U8/U9 teams must only play half-ice games throughout the season, unless they have received permission from their MHA President to also play full-ice games beginning on January 15.

Half-Ice game rules apply to all U8 teams throughout the entire season, and to all U9 teams and mixed U8/U9 teams who choose to play half-ice games throughout the season.

When playing half-ice games, Hockey Canada Half-Ice Game Play Rules will apply.

VIAHA's Cross-Ice Policy related to Game Play Rules (5.01 Cross Ice, sections 4-10) also applies.

When dividing a team into two units of players, coaches should use their best efforts to divide into an "A" unit and a "B" unit. The purpose of dividing teams in this way is to

have players of similar ability playing together to maximize puck-touches, stickhandling, passing and shooting opportunities for all players during games.

Transitional Full-Ice Game Rules

U8 teams may not play full-ice games.

U9 teams may choose to begin playing full-ice games on or after December 15.

Mixed U8/U9 teams who have received permission from their MHA President may choose to begin full-ice games on or after January 15.

The Transitional Full-Ice Game Rules will apply to teams who play full-ice games before February 1.

The Hockey Canada, BC Hockey and VIAHA Rules that apply to U11 Recreational game play will apply to U9 full-ice games, except as stated below:

- Penalties:
 - Minor penalties
 - When a player commits an infraction calling for a penalty, the official will raise their arm to indicate a penalty.
 - The official will blow their whistle and stop play immediately when the offending team gains possession and control of the puck.
 - Once play is stopped, the official will explain the infraction to the offending player.
 - The offending player will go to their team's bench and will be immediately substituted by another player from their bench.
 - The faceoff will be conducted at one of the two end zone faceoff locations in the offending team's defending zone.
 - Should an infraction occur that would normally require a player to be ejected from the game (i.e., game misconduct, match penalty, gross misconduct), the player will be removed for the remainder of that game and will be substituted from the bench.
 - In no circumstances will teams play shorthanded and no game incident report will be required.
- Shift changes
 - Shift changes will occur on the fly and not on a timed buzzer.
 - Shift length should not exceed two minutes.
- Fair and Equal Ice Time
 - All players should have the same opportunity to contribute, regardless of skill or ability. A coach's responsibility is to develop all players. 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.

- The game clock will be running time, allotting 5 minutes for a warm-up before the start of the game, and 2 minutes for a cheer and handshakes at the end of the game.
- No score is recorded.

Full-Ice Game Rules

The Hockey Canada, BC Hockey and VIAHA Rules that apply to U11 Recreational game play will apply to U9 full-ice games, except as stated below:

- Fair and Equal Ice Time
 - All players should have the same opportunity to contribute, regardless of skill or ability. A coach's responsibility is to develop all players. 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.
- The game clock will be running time, allotting 5 minutes for a warm-up before the start of the game, and 2 minutes for a cheer and handshakes at the end of the game.
 - If the time of a penalty expires while play is stopped, the player will remain in the penalty box and can exit the box once play resumes.
- No score and no penalties are recorded.

Note that after February 1, penalties will be called as they would in U11 Recreational games.

Deciding to Play Full-Ice Games

Coaches of U9 teams may choose to transition to full-ice games on December 15. Coaches of mixed U8/U9 teams who obtain the permission of their MHA President, may choose to transition to full-ice games on January 15.

In making the decision whether to play full-ice games, coaches must take into consideration the best interests of all players on their team.

Transitioning to full-ice can help prepare U9 players who are moving up to U11 in the following season where they will play exclusively full-ice games.

Coaches who wish to transition to full-ice play must review Hockey Canada's U9 Pathway and seriously consider how departing from half-ice play will affect the development of the players on their team. Only coaches who have determined that playing full-ice games will outweigh the benefits of half-ice games, may transition their teams to full-ice games.

MHA Presidents that grant a mixed U8/U9 team permission to play full-ice games, must be satisfied that the coaches have reviewed Hockey Canada's U9 Pathway and have

determined that playing full-ice games will outweigh the benefits of half-ice games, even for the U8s on the team.

Gamesheets

It is recommended a U9 Commissioner be appointed and that Spordle be used to track games using game numbers.

- No statistics or score kept, strictly an introductory Spordle exercise.
- Includes roster tracking.

Resources

[Hockey Canada U9 Pathway](#)

[Under-9 Hockey | Half-Ice Set-Up, Game Play Guidelines & Rules](#)

[Hockey Canada U7 Pathway](#)

[VIAHA Policy Manual](#)

MHA U9 division coordinator