



2026 NFHS FIELD HOCKEY RULES INTERPRETATIONS

Publisher's Note: The National Federation of State High School Associations is the only source of official high school interpretations. They do not set aside nor modify any rule. They are made and published by the NFHS in response to situations presented.

Davis Whitfield, Publisher, NFHS Publications © 2026

SITUATION 1: A penalty corner has been awarded. Before the ball is inserted, a defending field player becomes ill or injured. The coach attempts to substitute a player from the bench before the penalty corner is completed. **RULING:** Illegal. **COMMENT:** Rule 4-4-3 permits substitution prior to the completion of a penalty corner only for the replacement of an ill, injured, suspended or disqualified goalkeeper. A field player who becomes ill or injured during the setup of a penalty corner may be replaced by another player who is already legally on the field. No substitute may enter from the bench until the penalty corner has been completed.

SITUATION 2: A penalty corner has been awarded. During the setup for the penalty corner, the suspension time for a player expires. The player waits until the penalty corner has been completed before re-entering the game. **RULING:** Correct procedure. **COMMENT:** Rule 4-4-7 requires a suspended player returning to the game to follow the substitution provisions of Rule 4-4. Since substitutions are not permitted during a penalty corner, the suspended player must wait until the penalty corner has been completed before legally re-entering the game.

SITUATION 3: A penalty corner has been awarded. Before the ball is inserted, the defending team attempts to substitute for a field player for tactical reasons. **RULING:** Illegal substitution. **COMMENT:** Once a penalty corner has been awarded, field player substitutions are prohibited until the penalty corner has been completed. The only exception is the replacement of an ill, injured, suspended or disqualified goalkeeper with a properly equipped substitute goalkeeper, as permitted by Rule 4-4-3.

SITUATION 4: A penalty corner has been awarded. Before the ball is inserted, an official observes an unauthorized substitute entering the field. The substitute has not participated in play or influenced the penalty corner. **RULING:** Play continues. **COMMENT:** If the illegally substituted player has not participated in play or affected the penalty corner, the official should allow play to continue and address the illegal substitution at the next appropriate stoppage by assessing the appropriate penalty to the head coach. This prevents a team from gaining an advantage by using an illegal substitution to intentionally interrupt play.

SITUATION 5: A penalty corner has been awarded. Before the ball is inserted, an unauthorized substitute enters the field and participates in or influences play. **RULING:** The official shall stop play immediately. **COMMENT:** Once an illegally substituted player participates in or affects play, the official shall stop play, assess the appropriate penalty, and administer the proper restart in accordance with the rules. An illegally substituted player shall not be permitted to gain an advantage by participating in the penalty corner.

SITUATION 6: During a penalty corner, the defending goalkeeper becomes ill, injured, suspended, or disqualified. **RULING:** A properly equipped substitute goalkeeper shall replace the goalkeeper before play resumes. **COMMENT:** Rule 4-4-3 permits the replacement of an ill, injured, suspended, or disqualified goalkeeper during a penalty corner. Player safety requires that the defending team have a properly equipped goalkeeper before play resumes. If the goalkeeper is suspended or disqualified, the team shall continue play with one fewer field player, as required by rule. If the goalkeeper is ill or injured, the team is not required to play short, provided a properly equipped substitute goalkeeper is available.