



2026-27 Edition

USA Hockey Playing Rules Committee
NFHS Playing Rules Committee

(updated 9/30/2026 with 2025-29 USA Hockey, 2026-27 NFHS and 2026-28 NCAA Rules)

Rule (Situation)	Dif	USA Hockey (HS & Below)	N F H S	N C A A
SECTION 1 - RINK				
Goalkeeper Privileged Area	N	Yes	Yes	Not used
Goalkeeper Trapezoid marking	N	Not used	Not used	Yes
Goalkeeper warm-up area defined	U	Expanded Privileged Area	No rule	No rule
Maximum non-players on team bench	X	Four (4)	Five (5)	Eight (8) [Bench Minor after warning]
Goal Crease shape	U	6 ft. semi-circle	Truncated semi-circle	Truncated semi-circle
Face-Off Circle Hash Mark Distance	N	4 Feet	4 Feet	Recommended 5'-7"
Goal Peg Requirement	N	Recommended to be anchored	Recommended to be anchored	8-10" in Depth (limited waiver)
No Tobacco/Alcohol/Vaping on ice or bench	N	Game Misconduct	Game Misconduct	Ejection from game (tobacco)
Flexible Goal Pegs	N	Recommended	Recommended	Mandated
SECTION 2 - COMPOSITION OF TEAMS				
Maximum players in uniform	X	Maximum 20 total, maximum 18 skaters; 22/20 limits in Tier-1 15-Only and older	Maximum 20, including goalkeepers	Maximum 19 players; 2 or 3 goalkeepers (non-exhibition games)
Captains and Alternates	X	Captain + 2 Alternates (max.)	Max. 3 (any combination)	Captain and Designated Alt.
Visiting team wears dark uniforms	U	No rule	Yes	Yes
Logo limitations on uniform	U	None	Yes (logos, flags, memorial patch)	Yes (logo restrictions only)
Captain coming off bench to complain	X	All- Minor	(1) - Minor; (2) - Misconduct; (3) - Game Misconduct; (4) - Game Disqualification	(1) - Minor (2) - Misconduct (3) - Game Misconduct
Captains and Referees meet before game	U	No rule	Required	Required



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More than game roster limit on the ice during the pre-game warm-up	X	No rule - implied only rostered players may be on the ice	Permitted	Maximum 20 players plus 3 goalkeepers
Coach meets officials before game	F	Not required	Required and verifies proper equipment	Not required
Roster correction after game begins	X	Allowed - Bench Minor penalty	OK if inadvertent only; minor penalty assessed	Not permitted; Bench Minor penalty assessed
Jersey number in addition to back	X	No rule	Both sleeves	Front or both sleeves
"Temporary" goalkeeper	U	Permitted	No rule	No rule
Not starting with announced lineup	N	Permitted	Permitted	Bench Minor penalty
Retiring player location for legal change	N	At the bench	At the bench	Within 5 ft. of the bench
Pucks on ice before start of second or third periods	N	No rule	No rule	Charged with time-out; Bench Minor if time-out already used
Recovery time for injured goalkeeper	U	None	"Reasonable amount of time"	"Reasonable time"
Team huddles before 2 nd or 3 rd period	U	No rule	Minor	Bench Minor
Concussion/Unconscious player rule (requires health care professional OK to resume play)	U	See USAH Concussion Return to Play Policy	Required	Required
Stoppage for injured player (non-serious)	F	Immediate when their team has possession	Immediate (regardless of possession)	Immediate when their team has possession
SECTION 3 – EQUIPMENT				
Hollow end of stick must be covered	N	Yes	Yes	No rule
Max. widened portion of GK stick shaft	U	26 inches	28 inches	28 inches
Throat/neck protector – Goalkeeper	N	Required	Required	Recommended (<i>reqd. 27-28</i>)
Throat/neck protector – Player	N	Required	Required	Not required (<i>reqd. 27-28</i>)
HECC-certified helmet	N	Required	Required	Players – Required Goalkeepers- Recommended



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Wearing helmet (a) on players' bench Wearing helmet (b) on penalty bench	N	Required. Violation - Misc.	Required. Violation - Misc.	(a) Required.- Bench Minor (b) No rule
Helmet chinstrap length restriction	N	Implied	Implied	Two fingers
Torn, ripped, unzipped pants	U	No rule; implied not permitted	Not permitted	Not permitted
Mouthguard - non-clear color	N	Required	Required	No rule
Goalkeeper may play with broken stick	N	Not permitted	Not permitted	OK until next stoppage
Neck protector missing or dislodged – may the player remain on the ice during play?	X	Yes (ruled like mouthguard)	No. Minor penalty if not going to the bench when instructed	Not required equipment (required in 27-28)
Goalkeeper glove falls off during play	F	Play stopped if vulnerable and no imminent scoring opportunity	Play stopped immediately	Play stopped if vulnerable and no imminent scoring opportunity
Required Protective Equipment – Player	X	Helmet/Facemask Skates Mouthguard (12&U and Older) Neck Protector Player Personally responsible for all other recommended protective equipment	Helmet/Facemask Skates Gloves Padded Hockey Pants Protective Cup /Pelvic Protector Shin Guards Elbow Pads Shoulder Pads Tooth and Mouth Protector 1 st Offense - Misconduct Return – Game Misconduct	Helmet/Facemask Skates Player personally responsible for all other protective equipment. 1 st offense - Not permitted to participate. 2 nd offense - Misconduct . 3 rd offense - Game Misconduct
Casts / splints	N	OK if adequately covered and physician approved	OK if adequately covered and physician approved	No rule
Cut resistant socks and sleeves	X	Recommended	No rule	No rule (required. in 27-28)
Wearing exposed jewelry	X	Not permitted	(1) Misc. (2) Game Misc.	No rule
Equipment request limitation	U	Anything in Section 3 which has specifications	Sticks	Sticks
Location of logos on puck	N	No rule	No rule	Limited position



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Electronic equipment – dispute ruling	F	Bench Minor	Not permitted (no penalty)	Bench Minor
Electronic equipment - player on the ice	X	Misconduct	1 st Offense - Misconduct 2 nd Offense- Game Misconduct	No rule
Video usage on bench (coaching purposes)	N	Permitted	Permitted	Bench Minor
SECTION 4 - PENALTIES				
Bench Minor penalty defined	F	Yes	No rule (Captain's Choice of players on the ice at stoppage for serving penalties)	Yes
Penalty Length – minor, major, misconduct	U	May be shortened based on length of period	Standard length	Standard length
Who serves "Bench Minor" (NFHS equivalent)	X	Player on ice at infraction	Player on ice at stoppage	Any non-penalized player
Coincident minor penalty rule	N	Equal number of minors offset	Equal number of minors offset	Equal number of minors offset unless teams at full strength
Last 5 minutes or OT - Major penalty coincident with opposing team minor penalty	N	All times displayed on clock	All times displayed on clock	Only the time differential is displayed on clock
Major penalties	U	All majors carry game misconduct	Stand-alone major penalty option	Stand-alone major penalty option
Substitute on the penalty bench replacing a player who received a Major Penalty	N	Immediately	Immediately	At a stoppage prior to the expiration of the Major Penalty
Game suspension for Game Misconduct	U	Yes	No	No
2 nd Misconduct by Player in game	F	Game Misconduct in lieu of	No rule	Game Misconduct
Penalty maximum/game (player/GK); Penalty maximum/game (coach)	X U	Yes-4 (Game Misconduct) Yes-12 (Next game suspend)	Yes-5 (Game Misconduct) No	No No
Suspended Coach/Player behavior	U	Outlined with specific limits	No rule	No rule
Progressive suspension	X	Yes (Fighting and aggressive major penalties)	Yes (Disqualification Penalty)	Yes (Disqualification & Game Misconduct Penalties)



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Rule (Situation)	Dif	USA Hockey (HS & Below)	N F H S	N C A A
Standardized discipline for Match Penalties	U	Recommended	DQ-Minimum one game	DQ-Minimum one game
Match (DQ) penalty to non-player	N	Applies	Applies	No rule
Maximum Match/DQ per player per game	F	No limit	One	No limit
Who takes Penalty Shot if player selected is injured or ejected	X	Any teammate on the ice at the time of infraction	Any teammate on the ice when play stopped	(Ejection) Any teammate not then serving a penalty (Injury) Any teammate on the ice at time of infraction
Goalkeeper must serve their own major and/or misconduct penalties	F	No	Yes	No
Requires the recording of any delayed penalty nullified by a goal being scored	N	Yes	Yes	No
SECTION 5 – OFFICIALS				
Approved Officiating systems	X	RR, RLL or 2R-2L (not RRL)	RR, RRL, or 2R-2L	2R-2L RRL optional (Women's only)
Adjustment when one official is unable to Continue	X	(4 to 3) 2R-2L to RLL (3 to 2) RLL to RL or 2R (2 to 1) 2R - Emergency Official Rule	(4 to 3) 2R-2L to RRL (3 to 2) RRL to 2R (2 to 1) 2R to R	(4 to 3) if R: 2R-2L to RLL (4 to 3) if L: 2R-2L to RRL (3 to 2) RRL – Conference Rule
Linesperson may report unobserved MINOR pen.	X	"Injury Potential" minors only	Yes	Generally No
Face-offs - Start of periods and after goals (who conducts the face-off)	X	Referee	Referee; Linesperson option	Linesperson
Half-shield facemask required for Officials	N	Yes	Yes	No
SECTION 6 - PLAYING RULES				
Awarded goal for certain Penalty Shot situation if goalkeeper is not on the ice: - Falling on or picking up puck in crease	U	Awarded Goal	Penalty Shot only	Penalty Shot only



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Verbally abusing Official after game – player	X	Game Misconduct	Disqualification	Misconduct, Game Misconduct or Disqualification
Foul language on players' bench – player	X	Bench Minor; Misconduct if player is identifiable	Minor + Misconduct	Minor, Misconduct, Game Misconduct or Disqualification
Banging boards from players' bench	X	Bench Minor if done as means to celebrate body check	Minor, Misconduct, Game Misconduct, DQ	Player – Minor, Misconduct; Coach – Bench Mnr., Gm Misc.
Continuing altercation	X	Misconduct or Game Miscond.	Disqualification	Misconduct, Game Misconduct or Disqualification
Touching/Holding Game Official – player	U	Misconduct or Game Miscond.	Disqualification	Disqualification
Obscene Gesture – player	X	Game Misconduct	Minor + Game Misconduct. or Disqualification	Minor, Misconduct, Game Misc. or Disqualification
Hateful or Discriminatory Language	N	Match Penalty	Disqualification	Game Misconduct
“Detrimental Conduct” – player or Team Official	N	Match Penalty	Disqualification	Game Misconduct
Verbal abuse to Game Official after game by Team Official	F	Game Misconduct	Disqualification	Game Misconduct
Obscene Gesture by Team Official	X	Game Misconduct	Minor + Game Misconduct	Bench Minor
Thrown object onto the ice	N	Bench Minor	Minor	Player: Minor + Game Misc. Coach: Bench Minor + G.Misc.
Non-physical interference with On-Ice Officials	N	Misconduct	Misconduct	Minor, Misconduct or Gm. Misc.
Touching/Holding Game Official by Team Official	X	Game Misconduct	Disqualification	Bench Minor or Game Misconduct
Boarding	X	Minor + Misconduct, Major + Game Misconduct. or Match	Minor or Major; if flagrant, Major + Misconduct. or DQ	Minor, Major, Major + Game Misconduct or DQ
Body Checking (Competitive Contact Classifications where not permitted)	F	Minor, Major + Game Misconduct or Match	Minor, Major or DQ	Minor, Major + Game Misc. or Disqualification
Goalkeeper playing with a broken stick	N	Not permitted - Minor	Not permitted – Minor	OK until next stoppage
Butt-Ending	F	Major + Game Misconduct or Match	Disqualification	Major + Game Misc. or DQ



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Charging	X	Minor + Misconduct, Major + Game Misconduct. or Match	Minor, Major or DQ	Minor, Major, Major + Game Misconduct or DQ
Checking from Behind	X	Minor + Misconduct, Major + Game Misconduct, or Match; 5+GM or Match req'd if head-first into boards or goal	Major - Open ice Major + Misconduct or DQ if into boards or goal	Minor, Major, Major + Game Misconduct or Disqualification
Contact to the Head / Head Contact	X	Minor + Misconduct, Major + Game Misconduct. or Match	Minor, Major or DQ (Indirect) Major or DQ (Direct)	Minor, or Major + Game Misc. or DQ
Cross-Checking	X	Minor, Major + Game Misconduct or Match	Minor, Major or DQ	Minor, Major, Major + Game Misconduct or DQ
Delay of Game	U	GK must be in "act of playing goal" to freeze the puck	GK allowed to freeze puck in privileged area / above goal line	GK allowed to freeze puck in privileged area / above goal line
Elbowing	X	Minor, Major + Game Misconduct or Match	Minor, Major or DQ	Minor, Major, Major + Game Misconduct or DQ
Players must be stationary for face-off	U	No	Yes	Yes
Player/Line change at stoppage	N	5 seconds each for visitor and home team	5 seconds each for visitor and home team	5 seconds for visiting team and 8 seconds for home team
Player change after accidental goal dislodged by defending team	N	Permitted	Permitted	Not permitted
Player change after team shoots puck over glass and out of play in defending zone	N	Permitted	Permitted	Not permitted
Player change after team ices the puck	N	Permitted	Permitted	Not permitted
Player change after goalkeeper freezes puck shot from behind center ice, not being pressured	N	Permitted	Permitted	Not permitted
Face-off location after non-coincident penalty	U	Offending team's defending zone unless stoppage caused by non-offending team.	Offending team's defending zone	Offending team's defending zone
Face-off location for playing puck above high stick limit	N	Defending zone	Defending zone	Least territorial advantage (but not in attacking zone)



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End zone face-off after icing or after penalty creating a shorthanded situation	N	Officials determine spot	Officials determine spot (State may opt for NCAA rule)	Non-offending team may choose which spot
Face-off location, attacking team creates stoppage in attacking zone (general rule)	X	Neutral Zone	Attacking Zone	Neutral Zone, unless deflected off goal post or crossbar
Face-offs procedure – who places stick first?	N	Attacking center; Visiting team center ice	Attacking center; Visiting team center ice	Defending center; Visiting team center ice
First violation at a face-off	N	Center ejected	Center ejected	Warning only
Player change after hand pass stoppage	N	Permitted	Permitted	Not permitted in defending zone
Hand pass by face-off player	N	No rule	No rule	Not permitted – minor penalty
Immediate whistle for hand pass directly on goal	F	No	Yes	No
Instigating Fisticuffs	F	Minor	No special rule	Minor
Fisticuffs, including player struck during altercation who continues by retaliating	U	Minor, Double Minor, or Major + Game Misconduct	Disqualification	Disqualification
Subsequent player enters altercation (fight)	X	First in- Game Misconduct; Others- no automatic penalty	Disqualification	Minor, Misconduct, Game Misconduct, DQ
Deliberately removing helmet/facemask prior to or during altercation	U	Match	No rule	No rule
Unintentionally removing opponent helmet/facemask during altercation	U	Game Misconduct (2-game suspension)	No rule	No rule
Own helmet/facemask comes off head during altercation (improper wearing)	U	Game Misconduct	No rule	No rule
Deliberately removing helmet/facemask: (a) during normal play (b) during breakaway or last 2 minutes or OT	F	(a) Minor (b) Penalty Shot	(a) Minor plus Misconduct (b) Misconduct + Penalty Shot	(a) Minor (b) Pen. Shot or Awarded Goal
High Stick definition	F	Above normal shoulder height	Above 4 feet	Above normal shoulder height
Goal scored - puck strikes stick below High Stick definition, but part of stick is above that height	U	No Goal	Goal is allowed	Goal is allowed



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Immediate whistle for HS puck directly on goal	F	No	Yes	No
Goalkeeper play puck with high stick	N	No	No	Permitted
Grabbing Facemask	F	Major + Game Misconduct or Match	Major, Major + Misconduct or Disqualification	Major + Game Misconduct or Disqualification
Head-Butting	X	Major + Game Misconduct. or Match	Major, Major + Misconduct or Disqualification	Minor, Major + Game Misc., or Disqualification
High Sticking	X	Minor, Major + Game Misconduct or Match	Minor, Major or DQ	Minor, Major, Major + Game Misconduct or DQ
Holding	X	Minor, Major + Game Misconduct or Match	Minor, Major or DQ	Minor
Hooking	X	Minor, Major + Game Misconduct or Match	Minor, Major or DQ	Minor
Shorthanded Team can ice puck	U	Above 14U – Allowed 14U & younger – No	Allowed	Allowed
Interference	F	Minor Penalty	Minor, Major or DQ	Minor
Directing puck into goal with skate	N	Disallowed	Disallowed	Goal unless distinct kicking motion
Attacking player in crease when goal scored (goalkeeper is in the crease)	U	No goal	Allowed – No goal if interfering with the goalkeeper	Allowed – No goal if interfering with the goalkeeper
Kicking	U	Major + Game Misconduct (Push-Off) or Match (Kick)	Disqualification	Disqualification
Kick shot (skate kicks stick blade)	U	Stoppage of play	Misconduct	Misconduct
Kneeing	X	Minor + Misc., Major + Game Misconduct or Match	Minor, Major or DQ	Minor, Major, Major + Game Misconduct or DQ
Player leaves players' bench or penalty bench during altercation	U	Major + Game Misconduct	Disqualification	Disqualification
Extra player prevents breakaway	X	Penalty Shot	Penalty Shot + Misconduct	Bench Minor, Misconduct, and Penalty Shot



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Delayed offside permitted	U	Above 14U – Yes 14U and Younger - No	Yes	Yes
Tag-up to nullify delayed off-side	U	Above 14U – Yes 14U and Younger - No	Yes	Yes
Offside – position of trailing skate (straddling)	N	In contact with blue line	In contact with blue line	On or above blue line (= NHL)
Offside – Puck deflecting from Neutral Zone off defending player back into Defending zone with attacking player in zone.	N	Delayed offside	Delayed offside	No offside
Icing is nullified if goalkeeper leaves crease or feigns playing the puck	N	No	No	Yes
Stoppage of play for icing violation	N	Immediate when puck crosses goal line	Immediate when puck crosses goal line	Hybrid Icing
Carrying puck behind net more than once per period (not being checked)	N	No rule	No rule	Minor
Additional puck on ice	N	Stop only if interferes with play	Stop only if interferes with play	Stop at change of possession
Team refuses to start play when ordered to do so by Referee, after warning	X	After 15 seconds, Bench Minor; After second warning, Suspend game plus Match Pen.	3 minutes to comply. Major if complying or forfeit if not complying	Progression if continuing: Bench Minor, Major, Forfeiture
Slashing	X	Minor, Major + Game Misconduct or Match	Minor, Major or DQ	Minor, Major, Major + Game Misconduct or DQ
Slew-footing	F	Major + Game Misconduct or Match	Minor, Major or DQ	Major + Game Misc. or DQ.
Spearing	F	Major + Game Misconduct or Match	Disqualification	Major + Game Misconduct or Disqualification
Thrown stick (goalkeeper on ice)	U	At puck in Def. Zone or during breakaway: Pen. Shot, Otherwise: Minor	In Neutral or Defending Zone, preventing a goal: Pen. Shot Otherwise: minor	In Neutral or Defending Zone, preventing a goal: Pen. Shot Otherwise: minor
Stick thrown outside of the playing area	X	Misconduct or Game Misc.	Misconduct	Game Misconduct



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"Mercy Rule" (ending game early)	F	No	Permitted	No
Time of period	X	20 minutes maximum	15 (up to 17 min. by State)	20 minutes
Time-out permitted	U	Before conclusion of line change procedure	Anytime during a stoppage	Anytime during a stoppage
Max. period length, sudden-death overtime	X	10 min. (no resurface)	8 min. (no resurface)	5 min. (no resurface)
Teams change ends for first overtime	U	No rule	Yes	Yes
Overtime player count and timing format	X	5v5, 4v4, 3v3 permitted; 10 min.; repeat if tied	No rule (state associations set their own rules)	One 5 minute 3v3 required, then Confrnce. may require shootout
Shootout tiebreaker	F	Local League/Tournament Governance with guidelines	No rule	After 3v3 overtime, 3 players, then sudden victory (Men only)
Video review (not by coach's challenge)	X	No rule	By State Assoc. adoption only	Yes
Video review – coach's challenge	N	No rule	No rule	Yes
Tripping/Clipping/Leg Checking	X	Minor, Major + Game Misconduct or Match	Minor, Major or DQ	Minor, Major, Major + Game Misconduct or DQ
Unnecessary Roughness – avoidable check to vulnerable or defenseless player or after whistle	X	Minor, Major + Game Misconduct or Match	Minor, Major or DQ	Minor, Major, Major + Game Misconduct or DQ
Unnecessary Roughness – delivering check with no effort to gain possession of puck and stick is above knees	U	Minor, Major + Game Misconduct or Match	No rule	No rule
Unnecessary Roughness – delivering a check to an opponent who is physically engaged for possession of the puck with another player.	U	Minor, Major + Game Misconduct or Match	No rule	No rule
Unnecessary Roughness – GK delivering a body check to an opponent	U	Minor, Major + Game Misconduct or Match	No rule	No rule
Diving rule (Embellishment)	U	No rule	Minor	Minor



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GLOSSARY				
Act of playing goal (GK freezing puck)	U	Defined	No rule	No rule
Body Checking	U	Focus is on gaining puck possession, thus the stick must be below the knees of the player delivering the check	Defined as using body to separate opponent from the puck	Defined as using body to separate opponent from the puck
Involvement with the puck defined	U	Contact with the puck Possession of the puck Control of the puck	Possession Control	Possession Possession and Control Control
SIGNALS and PROCEDURES				
Goal scored - blowing the whistle	N	Yes	Yes	No
Icing signal, non-whistle arm, back official	F	Vertical	60° above horizontal	Vertical
Delayed offside	U	Non-whistle arm vertical	Non-whistle arm vertical; whistle arm angled toward line	Non-whistle arm vertical; whistle arm angled toward line

For purposes of this document, a Match Penalty (USAH) and a Disqualification (NFHS & NCAA) are considered identical. Both consist of a 5-minute penalty, immediate ejection from the game, and additional suspension.