

SECTION 3

# Seasonal Structure

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## Canadian Player Pathways

The 2020-21 season marks the full implementation of the Canadian Player Pathways approved by the Hockey Canada Board of Directors and its 13 Members for Timbits Under-7 (U7), Under-9 (U9), and Under-11 (U11) age divisions.

[Timbits U7 Canadian Player Pathway](#)

[U9 Canadian Player Pathway](#)

[U11 Canadian Player Pathway](#)

The Canadian Player Pathway is supported by the Hockey Canada [Long-Term Player Development \(LTPD\) Model](#). This framework provides the guiding principles for age-appropriate and skill-specific programming for all players in Hockey Canada's youth hockey system. By utilizing LTPD principles, Hockey Canada membership offers systems and structures that are consistent and ensure continuity as players move through the system from one age division to the next.

## IMPORTANCE OF PLAYER PATHWAY PRINCIPLES

It is likely that the seasonal structure model will need to be modified this season, with progressive Return to Hockey stages as illustrated in the previous section. It is in this context that the structure of the Canadian Player Pathways will naturally create several opportunities for progression and programming focused on the overall development of players.

With the need to modify a traditional season, the core principles of the Canadian Player Pathways remain more important and relevant than ever. These principles will guide local hockey associations in creating an optimal environment for player development and coaching.

**Refer to the Canadian Player Pathways for full descriptions of the following principles:**

**PRINCIPLE:**

**Player evaluation/selection/tryouts cannot be scheduled prior to the start of the school year.**

With the premature end of the previous hockey season, this principle can be implemented across the country and evaluations/selections/tryouts may take place at the appropriate time as we safely return to hockey, in accordance with public health authority and Hockey Canada Member guidelines.

**PRINCIPLE:**

**Minimum of four practices and/or skill sessions prior to formal player evaluation/selection/tryouts.**

As hockey gradually returns across the country with the primary focus on skill development, this principle can be easily implemented this season. However, even if a return to hockey is made without any significant difference from the past in certain provinces/territories, it is equally important to offer this preparation time for players.

**PRINCIPLE:**

**Player evaluation/selection/tryouts must be a minimum of three formal sessions. Recommendation is one skills session, one small-area games session and one game (age appropriate format).**

Once local hockey associations are permitted to form their teams, they must create a fair and transparent process that provides all players with a minimum of three on-ice sessions, as described. The format may need to be adjusted in accordance with public health authority, facility and/or Hockey Canada Member guidelines.

**PRINCIPLE:**

**Development time following team selection and prior to the start of the regular season.**

Although somewhat dependent on the progress of the Return to Hockey framework, this principle can be easily introduced as there is no rush to progress to a regular season, and players will benefit from additional development.

**PRINCIPLE:**

**Playoffs must be tournament-style format versus elimination rounds (U11).**

With the possibility of shortened or modified seasons, if a *Return to Regular Competition* is permitted, creating a format where all players play to the end of the season is important for an equitable player experience.

**Note:** No playoffs are allowed in Timbits U7 and U9.

## Canadian Player Pathways (U13, U15, U18) RECOMMENDATION

Although Canadian Player Pathway principles, as previously outlined, have not been adopted at the U13, U15 and U18 age divisions, it is important for local hockey associations and leagues to discuss implementation where possible this season and beyond. This will create equal opportunity and improved development for all players through an appropriate progression within different phases of the season.

## Length of Season

In addition to the principles that are included within the Canadian Player Pathways, you will also find annual seasonal structure calendars (including the appropriate number of practice sessions, games and jamborees/tournaments) that include these core seasonal phases:

- Preparation/Evaluation phase
- Development phase
- Regular Season phase
- End-of-Season/Playoff phase

It is within this seasonal structure that local hockey associations and leagues will likely have to adjust, depending on the situation in their province/territory. However, despite modifications to the season, it will continue to be extremely important to maintain the appropriate phases (percentage related to entire season) within your seasonal structure.

Again, if the season starts late, it is necessary to consider the guidelines associated with the last phase of the season, ensuring that as many players as possible finish at the same time, as late as possible, depending on facility availability.

## SEASONAL STRUCTURE VARIATION CHARTS

The charts in Appendix B provide a seasonal structure breakdown in each age division, with consideration of variations and flexibility to the start and/or length of the season. If you are required to reduce your season length, or choose shorter seasons (half- or multi-seasons), local hockey associations and leagues are provided with a variety of sliding scale options to utilize in seasonal planning, which all maintain the key principles of the Canadian Player Pathways.

### VERY IMPORTANT TO NOTE

- The number of practice sessions and games noted are a maximum, and it is quite possible these will need to be reduced within each phase due to ice availability (ratio should be maintained).
- Practice session structure and the allowance of games, jamborees or tournaments, at any given time during the season will depend on public health authority, facility and Hockey Canada Member guidelines, and game play may require modifications.

**SEE APPENDIX B: Seasonal Structure Variation Charts**

## Seasonal Options to Consider

With the uncertainty and challenges that lie ahead, consider a variety of options when creating programming for this season and in future years. As outlined in the previous section, maintaining the Canadian Player Pathways principles remains an important component, although you may be required or find it beneficial to modify the delivery model of your hockey programs.

- Be adaptable, flexible and provide choice
- Plan for the potential of reduced available ice time
- Maximize usage of outdoor ice & off-ice development
- Strive for standardized scheduling
- Limit tournaments and non-essential travel
- Include seasonal breaks
- Incorporate flexible skills sessions or training/development weekends
- Increase practice to game ratio
- Consider impact on volunteers

### PROVINCIAL/TERRITORIAL PHASE

Each province/territory has created a phased-in approach for the Return to Hockey plan in their respective jurisdiction. Creating a seasonal model in conjunction with each phase is an appropriate consideration when structuring your programming. Evaluate if families can opt-in to each phase, corresponding with fees and payment options.

### HALF-SEASON

Developing a half-season model (e.g. October-December & January-March) creates choice for families, as parents can opt-in to either season or register for both. This model may work best for younger age divisions. There is also an opportunity, through a longer evaluation and development period, for improved equity in competition in the second half of the season. This is beneficial for children that play multiple sports in the fall/winter. Coordination with facilities is important.

### MULTI-SEASON

Similar to the half-season, the multi-season model creates additional options for families throughout the year. Refer to the Seasonal Structure Variations charts (Appendix B), which provide structure for seasons of various length. This model creates more choice and reduces the length of commitment for families that may need increased flexibility. This is beneficial for children that play multiple sports. Coordination with facilities is extremely important due to scheduling.

## COMMUNITY HOCKEY

Creating programs that keep players and families close to home is beneficial for numerous reasons and may be required by the public health authority and/or Hockey Canada Member. There are scheduling benefits and an increased ability to customize programming for each age division. This enhances safety, the celebration of community and eliminates excessive travel, time and cost for families.

## LEAGUES/MINI-LEAGUES

Reducing the size of leagues and, therefore, the number of teams/players participating together enhances safety and adaptability, while eliminating excessive travel, time and cost for families. Similar to a community hockey model, there are scheduling benefits and an increased ability to customize programming. This is a good option for community arenas and cohort groups and could fit within the half- or multi-season model. **The role of each league is paramount in re-shaping any delivery model and requires collaboration with local hockey associations.**

## INTRO TO HOCKEY/RECREATIONAL STREAM

Many associations pre-define their hockey programming and teams as club or rep, dependent on the number of registered players. Establishing an option for families that may struggle with a significant time or financial commitment, but are interested in their child participating in hockey for fun, is an important consideration. A consistent schedule (e.g. one or two days per week, same time, same location) and flexibility in structure (e.g. drop-in options or game-play adaptations), may be received positively by many of today's families. This could also create an opportunity for growth.

## SPRING SEASON

It is important for young athletes to participate in multiple sports and have a break from hockey. However, there may be an option (given ice availability, capacity and Hockey Canada Member approval) to offer a sanctioned spring recreational program that focuses on fun and welcomes new players who are unable to play in the winter. Modified games, playing with friends and reasonable prices are all benefits. This may also reduce the desire for non-sanctioned spring/summer hockey and create a fundraising opportunity for associations due to lost tournaments.

## END OF SEASON

As outlined in the Canadian Player Pathways, it is important to adopt a tournament-style playoff to ensure all players play as long as possible each season. Facilities will also benefit from this pre-confirmed and utilized ice. If this type of competition is permitted by the public health authority and Hockey Canada Member, consider additional creative ways to end the season where the best experience can be achieved for ALL players.

## Facilities & Scheduling Modifications

### COORDINATION WITH FACILITIES

Effective coordination with facilities is essential to prepare for the season. It is necessary to evaluate the impact of hygiene measures and safety protocols on available blocks of ice time, as this will have a direct impact on training, practice and game schedules. Enhanced planning and communication is required to maintain or improve facility booking to create consistent schedules (days/times) and encourage new families to play hockey.

Consider working with other ice sports or recreation groups using the same facility to re-configure ice-time schedules where possible. Ideally, initial meetings should take place immediately for a 2020-21 season start. Remember, a facility's main goal is to maximize their bookings.

### PRIVATE/COMMUNITY-BASED FACILITIES

When planning schedules for this season, the availability of different arenas and venues should be evaluated. As these vary from private to community facilities, with completely different operation and management structures, it is important to know the status of those impacting your programs. Some facilities may start later or remain closed for the entire season.

For more information related to the reopening of facilities in each province/territory, visit the [Canadian Recreation Facilities Network](#) or confer with your facility.

### PLANNING FOR REDUCED ICE AVAILABILITY

With the potential for reduced ice availability this season, factor this into your seasonal planning. Some possible solutions include:

- Collaboration with neighbouring associations or community programs
- Shared ice sessions (if within parameters of public health authority guidelines)
- Shorter ice sessions (e.g. 45 min vs. 60 min)
- Reduced games and/or practices (maintain proper practice-to-game ratio)
- Avoid or limit booking of additional ice by individual coaches

### SEASON CANCELLED OR MODIFIED DUE TO OUTBREAK

Planning for different season scenarios is key. Be sure to stay on top of public health authority guidelines and the direction of your Hockey Canada Member. Utilize the Return to Hockey stages chart and corresponding resources to assist in reverting back to *Return to Ice* or *Return to Practice* if necessary. If the season is cancelled, ensure that a clear refund policy is in place (see page 27). Maintain constant communication with your members.

### VIRTUAL SESSIONS/ONLINE TOOLS

Avoid additional trips to fitness centres and arenas, and reduce the time needed before and after ice sessions, by providing virtual off-ice workouts, pre-practice planning tools and online team communication. There are many online platforms to choose from and sharing practice plans is easy through the Hockey Canada Network. Consider building these types of activities and resources into your seasonal schedules.

## VARIATIONS FOR AGE & SKILL LEVEL

Utilize the Canadian Player Pathways to adapt your schedules for varying age and skill levels. Re-evaluate your “normal” schedules at each age division to ensure they are developed to meet facility availability and adapt to the needs of the players. Varying game-play models (already implemented in Timbits U7 and U9) can also be considered if required; see *Return to Play* in Section 2 for various options.

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR TODAY’S FAMILY

This is a great opportunity to think about new scheduling models that meet the needs of young families. Now, more now than ever, it is essential to understand our customers. Ask these questions as you plan for the future:

- Is there demand for schedules that involve activities only once or twice a week?
- Do parents require consistency in terms of days and times?
- What is best for development and overall positive experience for young children?
- Have we considered scheduling modifications to meet the needs of teenagers?
- Are there ways to shape our season differently?

### Example – Two-Day Game Model

All games in a league for a specific age division scheduled on Mondays and Saturdays (showcase format on Saturdays). This decreases travel and children are only affected on a school night one day of the week.

## Team Structure

Although team formation and structure are always important considerations each season, there is no need to rush the formation of standard teams this year. Considerations should be made for keeping the players in contained skills or cohort groups until your province/territory enters an equivalent phase to the *Return to Play* or *Return to Regular Competition* stage.

## COACHING AND TEAM SAFETY

In addition to requirements by the public health authority and your Hockey Canada Member, coaches and team officials are asked to follow Hockey Canada’s Return to Hockey Safety Guidelines. This includes a section on the roles and responsibilities of the coach. We recommend that each local hockey association provide a checklist to their coaches that emphasizes the requirements to ensure a safe environment for players. The team’s safety person and/or communications officer should also ensure all pertinent information is shared with parents.

## RETURN TO HOCKEY SAFETY GUIDELINES E-LEARNING OVERVIEW

This new e-learning module (approx. 10-12 minutes), which will be hosted on Hockey University and available in August 2020 at no cost, offers a concise overview of Hockey Canada’s Return to Hockey Safety Guidelines. The program looks at some key information to help to reduce the risk of COVID-19 in the hockey environment. Throughout this module, we will provide detailed information on specific prevention topics and encourage all Members to become familiar with the public health authority guidelines and restrictions.

## COACHING TASK TEAM

Hockey Canada has established a Coaching Task Team to review additional resources, training and certification requirements for next season. The information will be available on the Hockey Canada [Return to Hockey](#) website upon completion.

## NUMBER OF TEAM OFFICIALS

To facilitate the practice of physical distancing, it may be appropriate to limit the number of team officials (e.g. two coaches and one safety person) on a team, or allowed on the ice/bench at any one time.

To help reduce potential transmission or spread, limiting the number of teams an individual can be rostered on as a team official should be considered, if possible. Although rostering team officials on multiple teams may be common practice (and necessary in some cases), special consideration should be given this season. Taking similar precautions as it relates to skills instructors, mentors or any other individuals in contact with multiple teams is important.

## TEAM FORMATION

Depending on your situation, the formation of teams may or may not be similar to past seasons. The authorized size of gatherings, participants allowed on-ice and/or cohort groups will largely dictate team size. Pay special attention to the requirements of your public health authority and Hockey Canada Member guidelines. If permitted, during the Return to Ice or Return to Practice stage, consider the creation of contained skills groups or cohorts (see following definitions). If you progress to the Return to Play stage, dividing into smaller groups (or teams) for competition (e.g. mini-league) is a natural progression and maintains a safe environment for participants.

### Example 1

Skills group or cohort of 30 players for skills/practices; divided into three groups of 10 for modified games entering the *Return to Play* stage.

### Example 2

Skills group or cohort of 50 players divided into four teams for practice and competition.

### Example 3

If 3-on-3 or 4-on-4 modified game play is required, multiple teams can be made from a skills group or cohort. Should *Return to Play* restrictions be reduced, or there is a *Return to Regular Competition*, the smaller teams could be merged into regular-sized teams.

There will be several requirements and/or options for team formation this season, but we would again caution into rushing evaluations and team selections without an appropriate, well thought-out process. Be sure to follow the Canadian Player Pathway principles when conducting player evaluations and/or tryouts.

## DEFINITION OF COHORT GROUP

Cohorts are generally small groups of people whose participants do not always keep two metres apart. There is a requirement to maintain physical distancing from anyone outside the cohort group. If considering the cohort group model, refer to your public health authority and Hockey Canada Member for specific details and requirements.

## SMALL/RURAL ASSOCIATIONS

Some small or rural associations may be required to increase their collaboration with neighbouring associations to ensure teams can be formed in a safe manner. If, as an example, you don't have the players required to form a minimum of two teams in a specific age division, you may want to work with other hockey associations in a close proximity to form teams included in a community-based league.

# Other Considerations

## AFFILIATION

Special consideration to limit affiliation between teams may be required to keep groups of players consistent throughout the season. In some areas, or at some levels of hockey, this may be difficult to apply. However, reducing the number of players participating with multiple teams to improve safety is a good principle to adopt.

## ROSTERING DATES

Notwithstanding any Hockey Canada Member regulations, league or local hockey association rostering regulations and deadlines may need to be reviewed. Specific dates and/or requirements may need to be placed on a sliding scale, depending on the season start date in your jurisdiction.

## TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS/TOURNAMENTS

It will be important to follow public health authority and Hockey Canada Member guidelines on restrictions for team travel. These may vary from region to region, within the same province and from province to province. Restrictions will also have an impact on leagues and tournaments that often involve significant travel. Be sure to understand these restrictions and communicate with your respective teams accordingly.

Hockey Canada has made the following national recommendations regarding tours and tournaments this year:

- As a general practice, tournament organizers are encouraged to accept entries only from teams operating within the Hockey Canada Member (or in the case of Ontario, from within the province).
- Any decision to accept teams from outside the Member/province should be made in consultation with the chief medical officer (CMO) of the Member.
- All participating teams, including teams from within the Member, should be advised that acceptance of their entry is conditional and may be revoked at any time, including after the tournament/tour begins, due to COVID-19-related concerns.
- Teams seeking to travel outside the Member/province for a tour or tournament must have their application approved by their Member in consultation with the CMO.
- Appropriate waivers should be included in the documents submitted by participating teams regarding assumption of financial and personal risk.