



HEADS UP HOCKEY

PROGRAM GUIDE

Safer Hockey
Smarter Hockey
Better Hockey





Dear Hockey Fan:
You and I have a lot in common.

We both want our players to play their best every time they hit the ice. And we want to keep them injury-free throughout the season.

My players are some of the best skaters in the world – professional athletes in top physical and mental condition. I think my job is a little easier than yours. Your players haven’t yet developed their reflexes and skating skills to this level, and don’t have the experience they need to make smart on-the-fly judgments.

That’s why I hope you’ll get your team started playing *Heads Up Hockey*.

Heads Up Hockey gives you and your team the information and techniques you need to prevent head injuries, both minor and major. But *Heads Up Hockey* is more, too. It’s smart hockey . . . it’s better hockey, as I think you’ll see when you go through the video and program guide, and the other materials of the *Heads Up Hockey* program.

I’m convinced that *Heads Up Hockey* is a great program for the entire game of hockey, at every level of play, from coaches to officials to players.

And *Heads Up Hockey* starts with you – so let’s get at it!

Best Wishes,

Ron Wilson



Ron Wilson
Head Coach,
2010 United States Olympic
Men’s Ice Hockey Team

National Coaching Advisor,
Heads Up Hockey



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Welcome to Heads Up Hockey

Safer hockey.

You know what it takes to help your team score goals, play solid defense and have fun: knowledge...skating, passing and stick handling skills...each player's commitment and motivation...good teamwork...and lots of practice.

But we're sure that's not all you care about. **Your instructions and actions can have a big influence on the safety of every player on the ice** — especially when it comes to preventing potentially serious injuries. Unfortunately, the information and help you need for this part of your job aren't widely available.

That's where *Heads Up Hockey* comes in. In this program, USA Hockey has developed and assembled the information, advice and techniques to help you reduce the risk of head injuries.

Smarter hockey.

Heads Up Hockey starts with medical information and specific actions you can take to prevent head injuries. But there's a lot more to it.

USA Hockey is a firm believer in the benefits of high-quality protective hockey equipment for its players. **But no equipment can prevent a serious spinal injury without other training and instruction.** And unfortunately, some players get an "invulnerable" feeling from wearing today's high tech protective equipment, resulting in more reckless play.

By following the *Heads Up Hockey* techniques in this program guide and in the accompanying videotape, you'll be developing new awareness and playing skills in each of your players. When you tell your kids "Heads Up!" you'll be telling them not just to play safe, but to focus. And player focus means...

Better hockey!

Much of the material in this Guide is directed toward age levels where body checking is permitted. But the basic principles apply to all age levels of hockey.

When you get your team playing *Heads Up Hockey*, you're helping your players...helping your team...and helping the whole game of hockey, by making the sport even more appealing at a time of growing popularity.

Let's play Heads Up Hockey!





Welcome

Heads Up Hockey Program Materials

The *Heads Up Hockey* Challenge video introduces the basic medical safety information; and goes on to deliver playing skills, drills and off-ice exercises, coaching advice and other information to help you and your team play safer, smarter, better hockey.

This Program Guide is meant to be used with (but can be used without):

- the *Heads Up Hockey* Challenge video. It backs up the video with more detailed information.
- the *Heads Up Hockey* quick reference guide, to be used during practices and games.

You'll see *Heads Up Hockey* posters where you play. We're distributing them to facilities to reinforce the basic message to coaches, officials and players, and to show the facility's support of safe hockey.

You may copy elements of the program for your own distribution. For more information about the Heads Up Hockey program visit the Heads Up Hockey page on our website at www.usahockey.com where you can download the Program Guide and view other related materials. To order additional Quick Reference Guides call USA Hockey at 800-495-USAH.

Head Injuries Are Preventable

Section 1

It's a contact sport, but...

Like any other contact sport, hockey has its share of sudden jolts. Players routinely make contact with other players, with goal posts, boards, pucks, sticks...and of course, with the ice itself. But injuries-especially potentially serious head injuries-are not part of the game.

You can raise your players' awareness of spinal injuries and concussions by learning more about how injuries happen, by passing this information along to your players, and by practicing specific prevention and playing techniques detailed in this guide.

Let's start by learning more about how these injuries happen.

How spinal injuries happen in hockey

The upper spinal column has a natural curve, which lends flexibility to the head and neck when the head is held in a normal "Heads Up" position (See illustration A).

But when the head is flexed (chin toward the chest), this normal curve is removed, and the cervical spine becomes straight, as illustration B demonstrates.

In this "head down position," when a player hits the boards or a goal post head on, the head stops suddenly, but the body's movement continues, compressing the spine. This force can produce a shock greater than the neck's discs and muscles can cushion, resulting in a fracture or break of one of more vertebrae. And if one breaks, it can cause compression of the spinal cord, resulting in paralysis below the level of the fracture.

According to research done among a wide range of hockey players, almost all on-ice cervical spine injuries have been due to the head being slightly flexed (head down) while making head-on contact with the boards or goal post.

A player doesn't have to be going at full speed for this to happen — it can occur at walking speed.

So that's the basis for Rule One of *Heads Up Hockey*: Heads Up — Don't Duck!

Charles H Tator et.al., *Spinal Injuries Due To Hockey*. Canadian Journal of Neurological Sciences; 11:34-41.



Illustration A:

The natural "Heads Up" position, which gives your neck the maximum flexibility to take a hit.



Illustration B:

When the neck is flexed (head down), an impact can result in serious spinal injury.



How concussions can happen in hockey

There are differences of opinion on the definition of a concussion, and on how to judge its severity.

But one working definition is: "...a clinical syndrome characterized by immediate and transient post-traumatic impairment of neural functions, such as the alteration of consciousness, disturbance of vision, equilibrium, etc., due to brain stem involvement."

Simply put it's an injury that arises from a blow to the head, usually when the head is moving. Symptoms of a concussion range from mild dizziness to "seeing stars" to severe headaches and nausea to unconsciousness.

In hockey, concussions are not the most common form of injury, but they require your attention for two important reasons:

- 1) Concussions, especially mild ones, may be hard to recognize. Players may show only momentary confusion from being "dinged" or "having their bell rung."
- 2) A concussion, even a mild one, may significantly increase the chances of getting a second concussion, and may endanger the player's awareness and safety on the ice.

No head impact injury can truly be regarded as minor. Each incident requires your prompt evaluation and attention.



What you can do

The risk of head injuries at all levels of hockey can be reduced through your participation in Heads Up Hockey.

- 1) Play Heads Up Hockey
 - Know the basics of injury prevention and pass them along to your players.
 - Practice the team's on-ice safety exercises in the Guide.
 - Promote fair play and clean checking on your team, and insist on it from your opponents.
- 2) Check your players' equipment before, during and after each practice session or game, and teach them to inspect it as well.
- 3) Keep your team in good shape through the flexibility and strengthening exercises in Section 4 of this Guide.
- 4) Know what to look for and how to respond when a player gets hurt by using the information in Section 5.



Section 2 **Playing Heads Up Hockey**

Incorporating Heads Up Hockey into team practices

In this section you'll find specific ways to improve the safety and quality of your team's play. Here are some ways to incorporate this material into your practice routine.

- Show the *Heads Up Hockey* Challenge video at the beginning of each session. Invite parents and team managers to see it too.
- Plan on 15 minutes of *Heads Up Hockey* at every other practice session.
- At each of these *Heads Up Hockey* sessions:
 - 5 minutes (Max) pre-session talk with Q&A
 - 10 minute on-ice drill
- Five *Heads Up Hockey* sessions total.

Heads Up Hockey Session 1: "Heads Up!"

Tell them what it means: "Heads Up!"

When we hear the phrase "Heads Up," we hear "be alert" and "be careful." Good advice for hockey players! But in *Heads Up Hockey*, it has a literal meaning, too.

At your first session, start by asking your players what they think "Heads Up" means, and help them translate it into hockey terms. You might get answers like:

- Know where the puck is
- Know where your teammates are
- Know where your opponents are
- Know where you're skating to
- Be ready to receive a pass or take a shot
- Know where your "man" is
- Look for open ice

Next, you can refer to the idea of "Heads up" as playing safe hockey. Ask players what else the phrase means to them. Depending on their age level, players might say:

- Skating to avoid other players
- Avoiding goal posts while driving to the net
- Keeping your stick down
- Not losing control on the ice
- Controlling your temper
- Knowing when you're about to get hit or be checked
- Preparing for impact along the boards

Now it's time to tell them Rule One of *Heads Up Hockey*: In Hockey, "Heads Up!" literally means exactly what it says: "Keep your head up on the ice, especially when it looks like you're going to take a hit."

Tell players that this is the *single most important thing* to know and do to prevent head injuries...and tell them that you're going to be looking for it from now on. Explain that most people duck when they see a hit coming, but doing so puts them in danger.

Drill 1: Say it loud: "Heads Up!"

During your first on-ice *Heads Up Hockey* session, you don't need any specific drills or plays to reinforce what you've told your team. Just watch their play, and shout "Heads Up!" from time to time throughout the session. Use it to remind players to keep alert...to point out unsafe situations...and to encourage skaters to keep their heads up, whether they're skating or sliding after a fall.





Heads Up Hockey Session 2: "Angling In"

Skating into the boards at an angle means better puck control and less risk of injury.

When the puck goes into a corner, everybody wants to dig it out...and dig it out fast. But what's the best way to get it out? And what's the safest way? Skating in *on an angle* is the best and safest way.

- Skating in on an angle affords players a **better approach angle** to the puck, and by giving the body a sage position to accept an impact with the boards, it allows players to **keep skating** and gain control of the puck.
- When players skate into the corners at an angle, the risk of hitting the boards with their helmets first is greatly reduced. A leg or side or an arm will absorb most of the impact.

Start this *Heads Up Hockey* discussion by inviting players to imagine a puck moving through a corner when they're close to the nearest end zone face-off spot. How should they go after the puck and why?

Now ask players to imagine the same puck moving the same way, but with an opponent behind them. Should there be any difference in approach? Why?

After getting answers from several players, explain the advantages of skating to the puck on an angle, rather than head-on against the boards.

When demonstrating "angling in," be sure to cover these points:

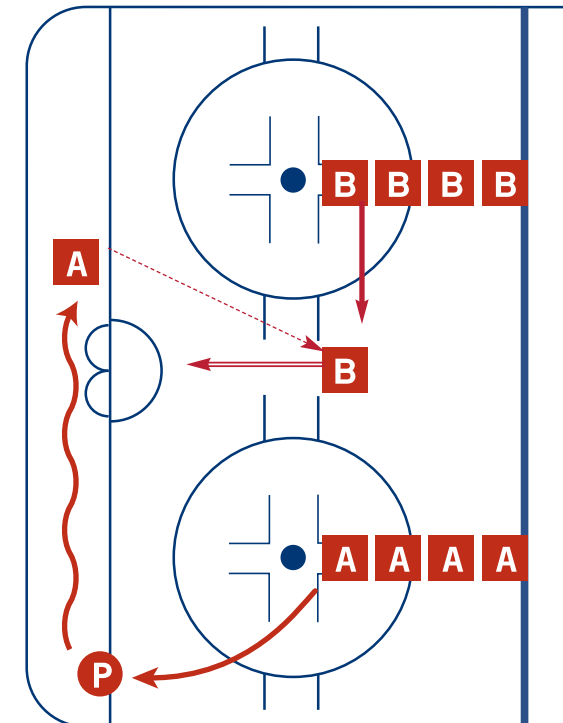
- Go in **on an angle**
- Keep a **low center of gravity**
- Knees **bent, back straight and head up**
- Absorb the shock over the **widest possible part** of your body
- Keep your **feet parallel to the boards**
- Forearms — hands — legs **ready**
- **Lean into** the impact
- **Never** hit the boards or glass with the **tip of your shoulder** — it can cause injury
- Check over your shoulder to see **where your opponent is**

Drill 2:

1. Set up two lines of four players (A and B) behind the face-off spots, and a pile of pucks (P) in the left corner.
2. On the whistle, the first player on the left face-off spot (A) angles into the corner, picks up a puck, skates behind the net and makes a pass to (B), who has moved from the face-off spot to the slot area.
3. Player (B) takes a shot on goal and joins the (A) line. Player (A) goes to the (B) Line.

Variations:

- Halfway through the drill, move the pucks to the right corner so players learn to pick up a puck and pass off both the forehand and backhand.
- A coach can stand to the side of the (A) line and slide a puck into the corner one at a time.
- For age levels with body checking, add a line of chasers who try to catch the puck carrier and angle him or her into the boards.



Heads Up Hockey: DRILL 2



Heads Up Hockey Session 3: "Hitting The Boards"

Good ways and bad ways to have a close encounter with a goal post, the boards, or another player.

It's going to happen: you play hockey, you're going to skate into things. But how players skate into the boards, the goal post or another player is important...for their safety as well as their ability to stay in the play.

Here are two simple rules:

- Don't Duck
- Hit the boards with *anything* but your head first.

In Section 1, you told players why they shouldn't duck their head on impact — here's an opportunity to reinforce it.

Start discussion by asking players what they should hit the boards with first when they know an impact is coming.

They might answer:

- An arm
- Their back
- A skate
- Their side
- Their stick

All of these, of course, are right answers. Players probably won't say "your head" as a possible answer, and you should congratulate players for that.

Conclude your discussion by demonstrating the best way to cushion an impact with the boards: with both hands on the stick if possible, and with their arms out creating a three-part "shock absorber." Players should try to absorb the impact over as much of their body as possible.



Two Simple Rules:

When hitting the boards there are two simple rules: Don't duck, and hit the boards with anything but your head first!

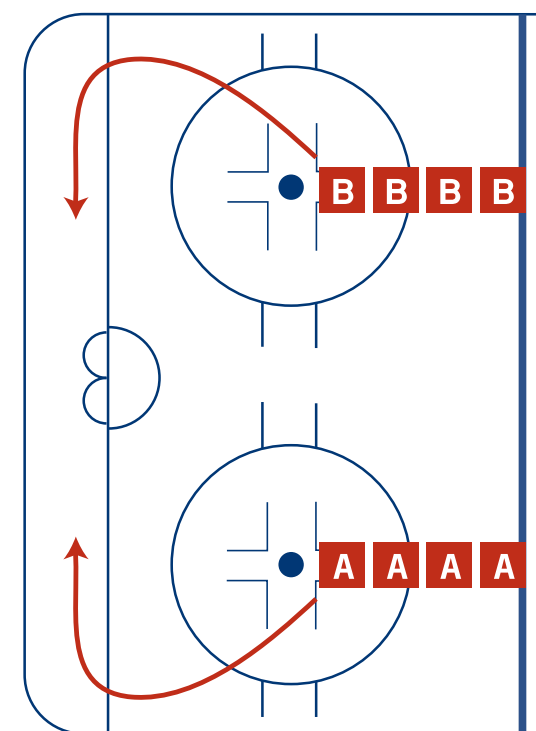
Drill 3

1. Set up two lines of players (A and B) at the face-off spots.
2. On the whistle, a player from each line skates at an angle toward the corner boards. The players should make contact with the boards and glass with their extended arms, forearms, side of body and legs...but with no head contact at all.
3. Players should alternate between lines (A) and (B). The speed at which the players hit the boards must be managed, depending on the skill level of the players. Proper head, arms and body position must be stressed.

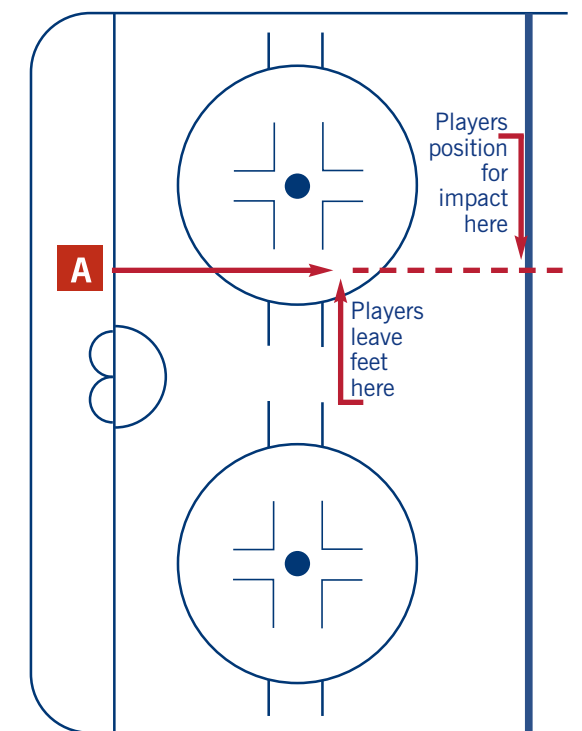
Variation:

From the goal line, players skate full speed toward the blue line. At the top of the face-off circles, they should leave their feet and slide on their side, back or stomach. Have them imagine the blue line as an impact with the boards.

Players should pretend to slide into the end boards, using arms, knees, legs and skates to absorb the impact. Proper heads-up position must be stressed.



Heads Up Hockey: DRILL 3



Heads Up Hockey: DRILL 3, Variation



Heads Up Hockey Session 4: "Taking A Check"

What players should do when they see it coming.

Since USA Hockey-sanctioned games do not include checking at some levels, this session might not be appropriate for all teams. But if you are coaching a younger team, you might still find the information useful as "body-contact" techniques, especially for less skilled skaters.

Preparing for a body check takes split second timing. But how a player prepares for a check determines whether he or she will keep or lose a puck, or how quickly he or she will be back in the play. Quick reflexes and smart moves when a check is coming also will lessen the chance of a head injury.

By this time, players will have some familiarity with the basics of *Heads Up Hockey*. So you might just ask them to see how many of these four basic safety techniques for taking a check they can come up with. Look for: **Heads Up-Don't Duck**. It's just as important in taking a check as in any impact.

Keep your head out of it. The more players can avoid impact with their heads, the more likely they are to come through safe and in control. They should take the impact with anything else first.

Know where your opponents are. As players become more experienced, and as they start thinking more about strategy and less about skating, their peripheral vision and overall awareness should start to improve. When they know where their opponents are, they'll be less likely to get checked without any warning.

Skate through the check. Although it may seem safer to slow down or stop if a hit is about to happen, your players' balance and momentum will be much better if they keep their legs moving and concentrate on skating right through the impact. They'll not only avoid head injury, they'll have a better chance of maintaining their balance and staying in the play.



Skate Through The Check

Although it may seem safer to slow down or stop if a hit is coming, your players' balance and momentum will be much better if they keep their legs moving and concentrate on skating right through the impact.

And if they get in a situation where they can't skate through a check, players should keep their arms up, knees bent and, of course, their heads up.

Be sure to cover these points:

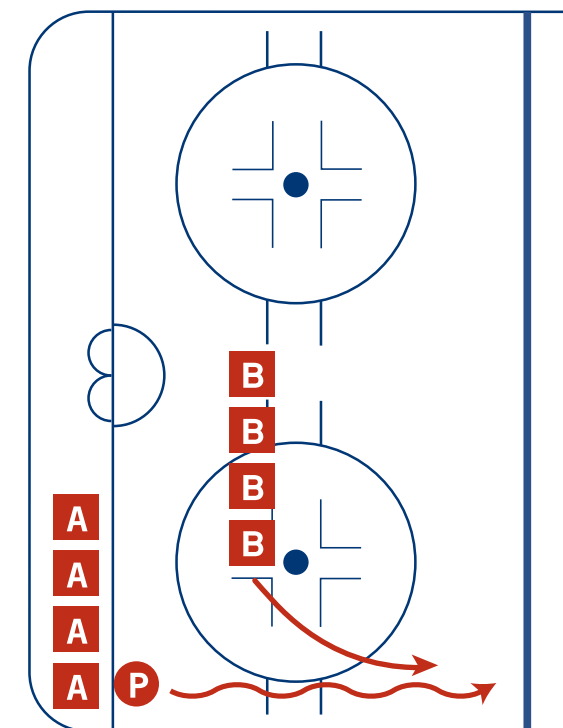
- Skates parallel to the boards
- Move out of the area quickly
- Keep your feet moving
- Arms/legs as shock absorbers
- Feet apart, knees bent, low center of gravity
- No shoulder contact on the boards, if possible

Drill 4:

Use this exercise to reinforce proper ways of giving and taking a check:

1. Set up a line of puck carriers (A) in the corner behind the goal line and one line of checkers (B) at the face off spot.
2. The puck carrier (A) moves up the boards and skates through the check of the (B) player.
3. For the puck carriers, stress heads-up position, keeping the legs moving and the stick down.
4. For the checkers, stress contact with the shoulders, not the head, elbows knees, stick or feet.
5. In this drill, players should alternate from puck carrier lines (A) to checking lines (B).

For best use of your ice time, set up the same drill in the other corner too.



Heads Up Hockey: DRILL 4



Heads Up Hockey Session 5: "Giving A Check"

Separating the puck from your opponent, not separating your opponent from consciousness.

As with the previous session, this material may be less appropriate for younger age levels where checking is not allowed, but the information is still valuable.

Hockey rules are specific about a legal body check. It's when...

"... a player checks an opponent who is in possession of the puck, by using his hip or body from the front, diagonally from the front or straight from the side, and does not take more than two fast steps in executing the check.

Legitimate body checking must be done only with the trunk of the body (hips and shoulders) and must be above the opponent's knees and below the neck. If body checking is unnecessarily rough, it must be penalized."

The point is, checks and body contact are not about intimidation and not about inflicting pain and injury. They're just one part of the game, along with skating, shooting, passing and puck handling.

In preparing your team for this *Heads Up Hockey* session, start them thinking by discussing the checking they see in NHL games on TV. Do they find it exciting? (Definitely.) Do they wish they could give a check like that themselves? (Probably.)

Now invite them to imagine themselves on the receiving end of some of those spectacular NHL checks. Could they take it? Remind your players that the checks they see on TV are given and taken by world class athletes in top form, who have the experience and control to play physical hockey at that level.

As a coach, the caliber and sportsmanship of your team's play is in your hands. We hope you'll promote safe, legal checking for your players. We also hope you'll insist on clean, legal checking from opposing teams, too. It's another way of keeping your team safe without suffering any competitive disadvantages.

Checking from behind:

It's illegal. And it's extremely dangerous. Even a light hit from behind could inflict a severe head or neck injury.

Be sure to tell your players that no matter how intense the game becomes, they must not hit another player from behind, ever. And, of course, checking from behind exposes your team to the possibility of a major penalty.

A word about reckless play:

Dumb!

In the heat of the game, players can occasionally get so psyched up they forget everything they've learned, and get into a play they have no chance of finishing safely.

Some players drive to the net so fast they just can't stop, making a dangerous collision practically a sure thing. You know this is bad hockey...and that it is dangerous hockey. The sad truth is, many hockey injuries are "self-inflicted" by players skating way past their limits and "going for it" at all costs.

Be sure to tell your team that reckless play like this does nobody any good. It rarely results in a goal or a good play, and often ends up as a penalty, an injury, or both.



Checking From Behind:

Checking from behind is illegal, extremely dangerous and less than courageous.



Section 3 Protective Hockey Equipment

The Superman Syndrome

Avoid the “Superman Syndrome” on the ice, and get the best use out of today’s protective equipment.

As good as it is, there isn’t any protective equipment that can keep a player from getting a serious spinal injury in a head-on collision with their head down.

But protective equipment can prevent or reduce concussions, as well as facial, mouth and other injuries, so we’ve included guidelines for the proper care and maintenance of protective equipment.

Look! Up in the sky! It’s a bird! It’s a plane...

Earlier in this guide, we spoke of reckless play as being “dumb hockey,” and it is. One factor leading to reckless play may actually be the “can’t get hurt” feeling some players get as a result of wearing protective equipment.

So it’s worth your while to tell players that the purpose of their protective equipment is to protect them from sticks, pucks, skates and other objects, not to allow them to skate recklessly.

Maintaining protective equipment:

Helmet

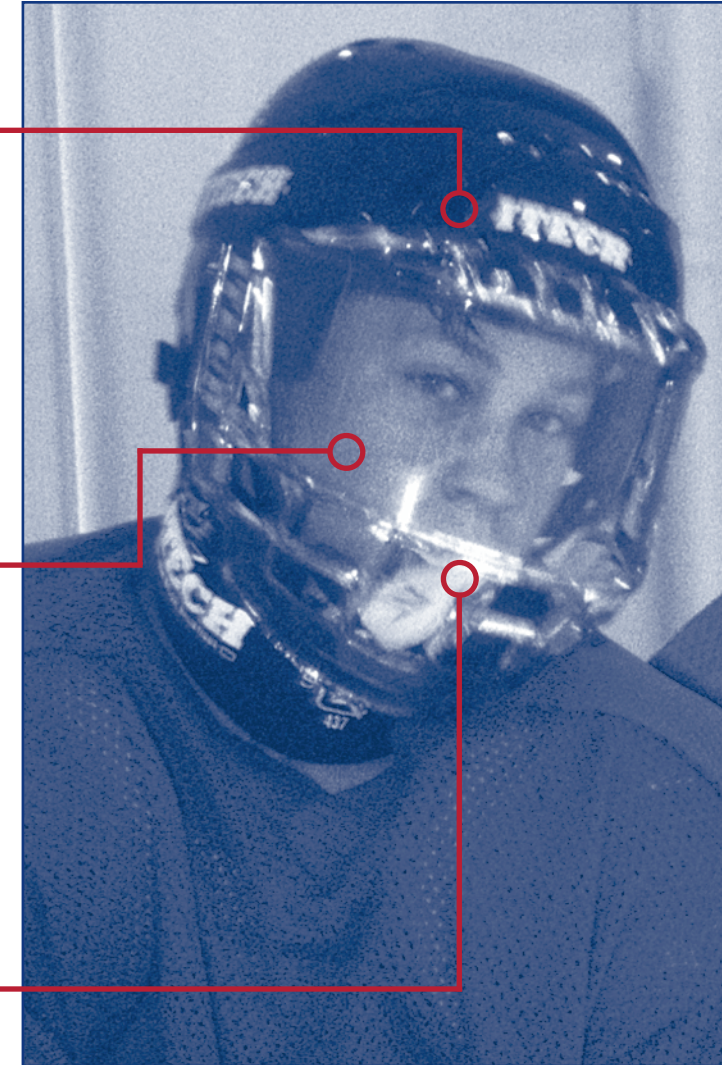
- Make sure all helmets are HECC-certified (including ear protection)
- Fit should be snug on top, back and sides of the head
- All padding and manufacturer’s hardware should be in place
- No cracks! Throw out a cracked helmet immediately; it’s not only ineffective, it’s dangerous
- Neck strap should be working and comfortable

Facial protection

- HECC-certified only
- If it’s a plastic shield, no cracks or scratches
- If it’s a wire cage, no bars bent or missing, and with coating must be intact
- Chin cup should be in place, and chin should sit comfortably in it
- All straps and snaps should be in place and working

Mouth guard

- Follow manufacturer’s instructions for proper fit
- Make sure breathing is not inhibited when in place





Section 4 Getting Your Team In Shape

Head and neck exercises

You know the value of regular exercise and general fitness to your players. In addition, a strong neck can actually help prevent head injuries. We hope you'll include these neck exercises in your teams loosening up and strengthening routine, as a valuable addition to their Heads Up Hockey program.

Players should complete this full routine five times a week.



Strengthening exercises

Strengthening exercises are repeated five times each in a sitting position. They may be done individually or with a partner of similar size and strength who resists the movement.

Flexibility exercises

As a warm up exercise: to obtain full mobility, isotonic exercises are repeated five times each in a sitting or standing position.

Shoulders are down and back in the starting position. Keep them there.



1. Drop your head sideways, and hold it for a slow count of six. Push against the tension, but not too hard.



2. Now drop it to the other side for a slow six count.



3. Turn your head to one side for a slow count of six, pushing against the tension.



4. Now reverse it and push to the other side. That's one repetition of this exercise. Repeat it four more times.



1. Hands together behind your head. Press against your hands for a slow count of six.



2. Now keep pushing with your head, but ease your hands' resistance to tilt your head back slowly.



3. One arm up, hand over your ear. Try to turn your head to one side, but resist with your hand. Hold for a count of six.



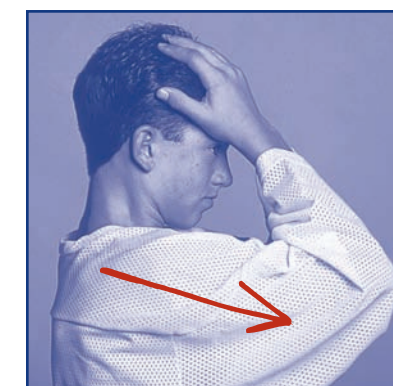
4. Now the same on the other side, for a slow count of six.



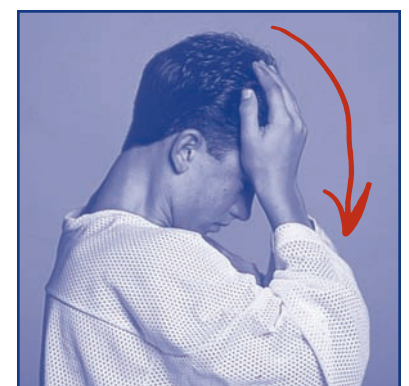
5. Now try to drop your head sideways, but resist for a slow count of six.



6. Change sides, press and hold for a slow count of six again.



7. Both arms in front, head in your hands. Push with your head and resist with your hands for a slow count of six.



8. Same position, but let your head move forward against your hands, slowly. Now repeat this whole exercise four more times.



Section 5 What To Do If A Player Gets Hurt

**You're a coach, not a doctor.
But sometimes you need to make
a medical decision on the spot.**

One of those situations is deciding whether or not to take a player out of a game after he or she has had a head impact. In the case of a concussion, your judgment is important, because even a mild concussion can have serious consequences.

Identifying and dealing with a spinal injury

In the case of a potential spinal injury, your immediate care and attention can make a big difference in the player's well being until medical care arrives.

If you think a player may have sustained a spinal injury, your immediate role is to get help and keep the player calm and immobile. After a spinal impact, look for these symptoms.

- Pain in the area of the injury
- Buzzing or tingling in the arms and/or legs
- Loss of movement in arms or legs
- Radiating pain in the arms or legs

After calling for immediate medical help, give care as follows:

- Ensure adequate airway and breathing.
- Observe the "ABC's" Airway, Breathing and Circulation.
- Reassure the player
- Do not allow the player to move. Instruct the player not to move and immobilize him or her to prevent any motion, especially motion of the head or neck.
- Keep the player warm.

Identifying and dealing with a concussion

We've adapted the following guidelines from the Colorado Medical Society Sports Medicine Committee, developed in 1991. These are not intended to be used as medical diagnosis.

They can help you judge the presence or absence of a concussion, and if present, its severity, as well as letting you know how to deal with it appropriately.

Grade 1 Concussion

- Confusion without amnesia
- No loss of consciousness

This is the most common form of concussion in contact sports, commonly called a "ding" or "having your bell rung."

Guideline for return to play: Remove the player from activity. Examine him or her immediately and every five minutes thereafter for the development of amnesia or post-concussion symptoms both at rest and with exertion. Let the player return to play if neither amnesia nor concussion appear for at least 20 minutes.

Grade 2 Concussion

- Confusion with amnesia
- No loss of consciousness

Guideline for return to play: Remove the player for the remainder of the game or practice, and seek medical help. Examine him or her frequently for signs of developing symptoms. Re-examine the next day. Let the player return to practice only after one full week without symptoms.

Grade 3 Concussion

- Loss of consciousness

Guideline for return to play: Seek medical help immediately for transport from rink by ambulance (with cervical spine immobilization if indicated) to the nearest hospital for medical evaluation. With medical approval, the player may return to practice only after one full week without symptoms.





Sideline evaluations for concussion

Use these guidelines to help decide whether a player may have sustained a Grade 1 concussion:

Orientation:

Ask the player the time, the place, the players, and the situation of the injury.

Concentration:

Ask the player to tell you the months of the year backwards.

Memory:

1. Ask the player the names of the last two teams you played.
2. Ask for details of the game or practice in progress: strategies, moves, plays, etc.
3. Ask the player to recall three words and three objects immediately and then the same three words and objects five minutes later.



Credits:

Heads Up Hockey Advisor

Alan B. Ashare, M.D.
St. Elizabeth's Medical Center
Chairperson, Safety and Protective
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The *Heads up Hockey* program is funded by a grant from the USA Hockey Foundation.

You can obtain a full multimedia kit including all elements of the *Heads Up Hockey* program (see page 4 of this Guide) from USA Hockey. Log on to our website, usahockey.com, for more information.

The *Heads Up Hockey* program is designed to help players, coaches, referees, parents and administrators in maintaining a safe and injury-free environment for all hockey participants. However, participants in any recreational or competitive sport should be aware of the inherent risk of injury.

USA HOCKEY

USA Hockey is the National Governing Body for the sport of ice hockey in the United States, as well as the official representative to the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) and the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) USA Hockey has a proud tradition of more than 70 years of tournaments, clinics, rules administration, safety and awareness programs.



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