



Concussion Chronicles

Special Edition: Player Safety

New USA Hockey Helmet Rule Implementation & Enforcement

A message from Director Steve Laing



In June 2017, USA Hockey made changes to **Rule 304** regarding the expiration of the helmet "certification" based on the HECC approval ratings. It is important for players, parents and guardians to realize the importance of this rule in relation to player safety, specifically as it relates to concussions.

The consequences of concussions and their long-term effects are important, sobering and very relative to youth athletes. The age-old belief that a young athlete (or anyone for that matter) can simply shrug off a concussive injury with no consequences or long-term impact or disability is simply incorrect.

The ability to lessen the severity of concussions is a continual focus for USA Hockey. Focusing primarily on the safety of athletes while playing this sport, proper equipment to protect the head is of vital importance. First and foremost, the player and his/her parents or guardians are responsible for wearing the proper equipment. The onus for doing so rests squarely on the player; although the younger the player, the more the responsibility rests on the parents.

Helmets are not designed to last forever nor maintain their protective qualities forever. USA Hockey has identified that helmets have a "useful life" and has amended its rules to reflect the manufacturer's and HECC's recommendations. If an HECC sticker is affixed to the helmet, it will reflect the certification date of that helmet. The rule indicates that an invalid helmet date should render the player ineligible for the game (*Rule 304 states: (Note) HECC certification includes an expiration date on the sticker and a helmet that has an expiration date that has expired is no longer considered certified. The player may not wear a helmet that does not have a valid and current certification sticker*).

If no sticker is affixed to the helmet, the officials are permitted to inspect the helmet to ensure it meets the safety requirements of a helmet. Visually, the officials will certainly be able to see if the helmet contains the necessary clips, snaps, chin strap, "J" hooks, ear flaps, etc., and if it does not, it is an equipment violation and the player shall be sent off the ice. Similarly, if a goalie mask or any facemask for that matter is of such a quality that a butt end of a stick could penetrate through the cage openings, that facemask is not permitted and that player shall be sent off the ice.

Again, this is a player safety rule; it is not meant to be punitive. It goes hand in hand with the efforts the Pacific District is making to educate its affiliates and members regarding concussions with the goal of lessening their impact on our athletes. We also assume that we are all on the same page:

An athlete's safety is the top, #1 priority for all of us.