



USA HOCKEY OFFICIATING PROGRAM

COVID-19 FAQ'S

Hockey is back! Many officials have questions as they begin to plan for their hockey seasons as rinks begin to re-open across the country. USA Hockey has been working with healthcare professionals and other stakeholders to develop the best experience for the 2020-21 season. Below you will find a Q&A that provides much of the information that has been shared with USA Hockey, and will provide answers to questions you may have as officials return to rinks. USA Hockey will regularly update information at USAHockey.com.

While hockey may look a little different as things get started, hockey programming will continue to evolve and return to a format that we traditionally know. USA Hockey is committed to creating a safe and positive environment for all participants.

What are some basic guidelines that all USA Hockey participants should follow?

- Practice social distancing as much as possible when arriving to the rink, while off the ice and leaving the rink.
- Wash your hands with soap and water often and avoid touching your face. If soap and water is not available, then use hand sanitizer.
- When sneezing or coughing, do so into a tissue or the bend of your elbow. Wash or sanitize hands immediately and discard of tissue into appropriate waste bin.
- Wear a cloth facemask at all times when not playing or during high intensity aerobic activity. A cloth mask protects the wearer's nose and mouth from contact with droplets and may protect others by reducing exposure to the saliva and respiratory secretions of the mask wearer. This is especially important if someone is infected but does not have symptoms. Coaches and other support personnel should wear cloth masks at all times.
- Avoid sharing equipment, towels and water bottles.
- Wash and clean all equipment after every game or practice session.
- If participant has a fever, sore throat, cough or any other symptoms – STAY HOME!

Why should I register now when we are not sure there will even be a season?

Hockey is already back in many areas of the country and all areas are making return to play plans that take into consideration local health recommendations and restrictions. Starting the registration process will allow you to complete testing, online modules and other requirements to be ready to go when the games begin. For those areas where in-person seminars are not a possibility, "virtual" seminars will be starting in mid-July.

Will USA Hockey provide registration discounts or credits if a full season is not able to take place?

USA Hockey provides year-long resources to members and benefits continue even after the season is complete, so USA Hockey does not prorate or refund membership. From an officiating perspective, the registration fees are designed to provide sanctioning, insurance coverage and education to our registered officials along with additional benefits all members receive such as *USA Hockey Magazine*, standardized playing rules and disciplinary support. Registration with USA Hockey is not a guarantee of game assignment.

Are players going to be required to wear full “clear” facemasks in an effort to prevent the spread of coronavirus?

No. There is no scientific proof that a full clear shield on a hockey helmet provides better protection against infectious diseases compared to a visor (half shield) or cage. That said, a full clear shield is likely better than a visor (half shield) or cage:

1. Can act as a barrier in case someone in close proximity coughs or sneezes
2. May be a deterrent to decrease touch of the face (vs. cages where players stick their fingers through the cage)
3. Likely to prevent spitting on the ice/bench (should be enforced regardless)

It should be noted that a full clear shield will not prevent the inhalation of aerosolized droplets.

And it is important that regardless of what kind of mask a player wears that it be cleaned thoroughly after each use.

Many official’s dressing rooms are rather small. How are officials going to be able to practice social distancing when there is hardly enough space for 2 officials, let alone 4 or more?

There are times when social distancing is simply not possible and the CDC and medical experts’ recommendations in those situations is to wear a mask. This may also require a little extra teamwork as the next game crew can arrive and get dressed a little earlier so the crew coming off the ice has some space, or, the crew coming off the ice can wait a few minutes until the next crew is dressed and can step out. The bottom line is good teamwork may be necessary to respect everyone’s space and good teamwork is a must for successful officiating anyhow.

In some cases, there may be situations where the dressing rooms are not open and it may require the officials to arrive at the rink fully dressed except skates, helmet and sweater – just like the players. It is important to work with your local assignors and understand the local restrictions and protocols so you can be prepared and are focused on the game.

Some local areas may have restrictions on the number of people that are allowed in a rink and, as a result, a local league/association/affiliate may want to only use one official. What is USA Hockey’s position on this?

USA Hockey’s Playing Rule 501(a) only recognizes the two-official, three-official (one referee and two linesmen) and four-official systems as viable options for USA Hockey sanctioned games. All full-ice USA Hockey games must be officiated with a minimum of two officials, unless covered under the emergency referee rule as a result of extenuating circumstances.

In some cases, a local league or association may choose to play recreational cross-ice/half-ice games. Although cross-ice/half-ice 3v3 or 4v4 organized games are also considered sanctioned events, they are not considered sanctioned games. A general rule of thumb: if officials are assigned to these events for any cross-ice/half-ice played at the 12U level of play or below, one official is deemed satisfactory. For those cross-ice 3v3 or 4v4 games played at the 14U or older age classifications, two officials are strongly recommended.

What is USA Hockey’s position on officials wearing cloth masks?

The wearing of a cloth mask during a game is the choice of the official. Similar to players, the mask may hamper breathing during exercise and may also become sweaty. However, if the official feels more comfortable wearing the mask, they then should choose to do so. Naturally, a cloth mask should be worn by all officials anywhere in the rink prior to and just after leaving the ice.

What is USA Hockey's recommendation for officials wearing latex gloves?

The CDC and USA Hockey medical experts all recommend that latex gloves NOT be worn by game officials. The concern is if the official's hands come in contact with the virus while wearing the gloves, the virus will remain on the glove until changed. If the official then touches his/her face, the virus would be transferred and there is a greater risk of contracting the virus. So, unless the official plans on changing gloves after every face-off, gloves would not be an effective way to prevent transmission. More important for the officials is the following:

- Bring hand sanitizer to the game and leave on scorer's bench to be able to properly use at the end of each period.
- Avoid touching your face.
- Disinfect any game pucks prior to the game and in between periods.

What is USA Hockey's recommendation for officials who may want to use an electronic whistle?

Electronic whistles are an acceptable option for on-ice officials. Blowing on a standard finger whistle could propel moisture droplets into the air and would expose players and coaches to the virus. However, if the official is not carrying the virus or showing any symptoms for a cold or other virus, a standard whistle would not increase the official's risk of contracting or spreading the virus.

Electronic whistles are a personal choice that each official can make. However, regardless as to whether an electronic or standard finger whistle is used, it is important that the official cleans/disinfects the whistle after each game and even between periods.

What should officials do when they need to communicate with a coach or player?

Part of the updated Zero Tolerance Policy on Abuse of Officials includes USA Hockey asking the officials to approach each bench, introduce themselves to the coaches and open up the lines of communication with the coaches. This is an excellent opportunity to establish expectations regarding communication with the coaches, or captains, during the game.

However, unlike in the past, the officials and coaches should NOT shake hands and the officials should maintain proper social distancing six feet from the bench. This should be the standard practice/position if it was necessary to communicate with a coach during the game, as well.

In regards to captains and players, this is an excellent opportunity to re-establish the importance of the referee's crease. For any longer conversations, the officials should position themselves in the crease and ask the players to maintain their distance outside the crease. For quicker conversations, the officials should simply remind the players to maintain an appropriate distance.

How about separating players during an altercation? What is USA Hockey's recommendation for the role of the official in separating players?

The officials still have a job to do and one of their responsibilities is to protect the players and do their part in maintaining a safe environment for all participants during scrum situations. Awareness and hustle by the officials are more important than ever as doing so will prevent altercations and/or de-escalate heated moments.

When an altercation occurs, the officials should exercise proper techniques to quickly and efficiently separate the players. Once separated, minimize any contact with the players and place yourself in a good position to maintain separation while escorting the player(s) to the penalty bench.

USA Hockey's medical advisors suggest that following proper procedures in separating players quickly and then re-establishing reasonable distance between the official and the players provides minimal risk. Using the stoppage of play to utilize hand sanitizer to disinfect the hands will also provide additional protection.

Hockey players, and even many coaches, like to spit in the bench area and on the ice surrounding the benches. What is USA Hockey's position on spitting?

USA Hockey follows the CDC recommendations on spitting and strongly discourages any game participant from spitting on the ice, bench or anywhere in the arena. Many rinks also have signs that discourage spitting and this will continue to be a significant point of emphasis.

However, officials cannot be expected to be the "spit" police as their focus needs to be with the players on the ice. If it becomes an obvious action by one or both of the teams, then it would be appropriate for the officials to remind the benches that spitting is inappropriate and a continued lack of respect for other participants could result in a bench minor penalty being assessed.

Naturally, any player/coach who intentionally spits in the direction of any opponent or official must be assessed a match penalty.

USA Hockey's medical advisors believe the risk of an official contracting the coronavirus from a puck that has come in contact with spit on the ice is likely minimal, especially if the official is avoiding touching their face and cleaning their hands often.

What is USA Hockey recommending for the post-game handshake?

USA Hockey is strongly recommending local areas eliminate the post-game handshake for all USA Hockey sanctioned games. In its place as a show of sportsmanship, USA Hockey suggests that at the conclusion of the game, both teams line up at their respective blue lines and salute their opponents, and the officials, with a stick tap prior to immediately leaving the ice.

Officials should not shake hands, or fist bump, with players or coaches. If the coaches approach the officials on the ice post-game with the intent of shaking hands, an elbow bump or a quick wave and thank you as you are skating away would be appropriate.

In summary, what are the key things officials can do to minimize their risk and contribute to the safest possible environment?

Officiating ice hockey will always contain certain risks. An official could get hit by a puck or lose a skate edge at any time and following proper procedures and following best practices greatly reduces those risks. The same is true regarding the coronavirus. Always following the recommended guidelines and best practices outlined above will minimize the risk for all involved and will contribute to a safe and positive environment.