



How to Clean Hockey Equipment



There are few moments in hockey worse than opening your equipment bag only to be hit in the face by something more odious than an opposing player: Often called "rink stink," it's the stench that comes from leaving damp gear in your bag instead of allowing it to dry first. A stinky hockey bag has a smell like no other—but the odor, as bad as it is, isn't the only problem that can occur when equipment isn't clean.

That unique stink results from harmful bacteria that grow in sweat, blood, and soil that build up over time. Bacteria thrive in warm, moist environments like damp gear bags. When left to grow and multiply, the bacteria can become dangerous and spread disease and illness from player to player. Because hockey is a contact sport, cuts and abrasions are common, and bacteria-laden gear can introduce problematic or potentially deadly diseases into your body. And over time, the odor will only get worse. Bacterial growth and moisture can also cause hockey gear to deteriorate prematurely. Professional cleaning services are costly, and the thought of cleaning hockey equipment yourself might seem intimidating. But you can prevent the growth of harmful bacteria and treat that special smell by practicing a few simple strategies at home.

"RINK STINK" PREVENTION

Prevention is the first and most crucial step in avoiding smelly equipment and the growth of dangerous bacteria. Let's talk about how to prevent your gear from developing "rink stink" or making you sick.

Wear Base Layers – Wear a base layer between yourself and your equipment. By doing this, you'll create a barrier that will help wick away moisture from you and your gear.

Dry It Out - Drying out your gear after practice or a game is the single most important measure you can take to prevent harmful bacteria growth and subsequent odors. As soon as possible, remove all equipment from your bag, wipe it down with **disinfecting spray** or wipes and leave it open so it dries thoroughly. Place all equipment in a warm, well-ventilated area to air out and dry.

Use Drying Racks - A drying rack is especially helpful because it allows for better air circulation around your gear. A **hockey drying rack** will dry your gear and kill the bacteria that develops during use.

Get a Boot and Glove Dryer - If limited space makes a larger hockey drying rack impractical, consider purchasing a boot and glove dryer. Its compact size makes it ideal for tight spaces (and budgets). And it's not just for boots and gloves—many dryers come ready for optional helmet holder attachments.

IT STINKS—HOW TO CLEAN YOUR HOCKEY EQUIPMENT AND GET RID OF THE SMELL

If you've left your hockey gear to sit for too long and it's starting to smell a little funky, you can clean it with ordinary supplies you probably already have at home. You'll save money, enjoy clean, fresh gear, and prolong the life of your equipment. Here are some tips for cleaning hockey equipment at home.

WASHING MACHINE

Except for your hockey helmet and skates and certain goaltending items, all your gear can be cleaned in the washing machine.

WHAT CAN GO INTO THE MACHINE:

- Base Layers
- Socks and athletic supporter
- Jersey and pants
- Elbow pads
- Shoulder pads
- Gloves - Note: Do not place gloves in the dryer; the heated air may damage the leather pads. Instead, prop them open and allow them to air dry or place them on a boot and glove dryer.

MACHINE DO'S AND DON'TS

- If your gear is especially smelly, use the "pre-soak" feature on your machine and allow the gear to soak for an hour. Consider adding one cup of plain white vinegar to the load. Vinegar is a natural odor neutralizer and won't damage materials. Pre-soaking gear is also helpful if you have a top-loading

machine as it gives the gear time to soak up the water to weigh it down and prevent it from floating to the surface.

- Remember to fasten velcro closures, as they can snag and tear other materials. Be sure to separate insert liners from other equipment (**shin guards**, for example) to make sure you get everything clean.
- Use the gentle wash cycle and warm water.
- Use **special detergent** that won't damage your gear and is made for removing stains and odors, especially those set into synthetic fabrics.
- Don't use bleach, detergents containing bleach, or bleaching agents, as they will break down the materials in your gear.
- Don't overload your washer, as it may damage your machine and your equipment.
- Once everything has been through the washer, you can put most gear in the dryer on low heat. Be sure to check the manufacturer's label for specific cleaning instructions, including whether it's safe to place a particular piece of equipment in the dryer. If you opt not to put your gear in the dryer, lay it out in a dry, well-ventilated area so that it dries completely.

OTHER CLEANING METHODS

You can clean your hockey gear using your dishwasher, sink, or bathtub at home using these suggestions.

HAND WASHING

As when you wash your hockey gear in a machine, be sure to separate insert liners from equipment to make sure you get everything clean.

- Fill your sink or tub with warm water, detergent, and vinegar, and allow the equipment to soak for 45 minutes to an hour.
- Using a soft cloth or sponge, wipe down every piece of gear while it's in the water. Rinse thoroughly.
- Remove the gear from the water and allow it to dry completely.

DISHWASHER

Taking certain precautions, you can wash smaller pieces of gear in your dishwasher.

- Place gear in an empty dishwasher. Turn off the heated drying cycle and run the dishwasher on the highest heat wash settings.
- Do not use dishwasher detergent, as most contain bleaching agents and harsh additives which can damage your gear. And be advised that using any other soap in your dishwasher can damage your machine.
- Remove gear promptly and allow it to dry completely.

WHAT ABOUT ITEMS YOU CAN'T MACHINE WASH? HOW TO CLEAN HELMETS, SKATES, AND GOALTENDING EQUIPMENT

HELMETS

Remove the **facemask/face cage** and chin cup. Wipe down and dry the facemask or face cage and chin cup using disinfecting spray or wipes. Using a no-tear shampoo and water mixture (to prevent stinging soap from dripping into your eyes during play), and a soft sponge, wash the entire helmet, inside and out. Rinse well, taking care to remove all the soap. Thoroughly dry your helmet using a clean towel and then leave it to dry in a warm, well-ventilated area.

SKATES

Hockey skates can stink just as bad, if not worse, than the rest of your equipment. Let's talk about how to clean your skates, and get rid of the odor. First remove the insoles after each practice or game, and hang them up to dry, making sure they dry

completely. Then, using either a solution of vinegar and water or a **sports gear odor neutralizing spray**, spray down and thoroughly wipe out the interior of your skate. Allow skates to dry completely either by hanging them to dry, or placing them on a boot dryer.

GOALTENDING GEAR

Keeping your goaltending gear clean and fresh can seem challenging, but in reality it doesn't need to be. Machine washing, or thoroughly soaking in water, is not recommended because the gear can't dry completely, which will encourage the growth of bacteria and mildew. And complete immersion can damage your equipment, causing separation of the materials. Instead, do the following:

- Chest Protectors, Gloves, Blockers, and Pants – Using cold water and a mild detergent free of bleaching agents, lightly scrub your goaltending gear using a soft sponge, and then rinse thoroughly, making sure all detergent is removed. Hang up to dry completely. Once they're completely dried, treat goalie glove and blocker with a disinfectant. This will help eliminate odors and prevent bacterial growth.
- Leg Pads – Clean with a warm, damp cloth and hang upside down to dry thoroughly.
- Goalie Mask – Clean with a soft, damp cloth, and then dry. The sweatband, however, can be removed and placed in the washing machine with your other gear. Do not use chemicals or heavy cleaning solvents to clean your goalie mask as they can break down the materials.

While prevention is the first and most important step in keeping your gear free from smelly and potentially dangerous bacterial growth, if your gear has started to stink, cleaning it at home need not be intimidating or costly. Whether you toss your hockey gear into the washing machine or dishwasher, or wash it by hand, these tips can prevent the expense of a professional cleaning, prolong the life of your gear, and keep you healthy and smelling great out on the ice.