



HOCKEY CALGARY

**EVERYONE'S
GAME**

U7 & U9

**INTRO TO
HOCKEY**

• GUIDE •

DECREASE THE SPACE, INCREASE THE PACE

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Intro to Hockey Operations Guide 2026-27 – Coach Overview

This guide explains how Hockey Calgary's U7 Timbits and U9 Development League operate: game formats, seasonal and time-slot structure, tournament limits, and key dates for the 2026-27 season. It is written for head coaches, assistant coaches, and team managers, and should be used alongside Hockey Calgary's Regulations and your member club's policies.

Quick Start:

- U7 plays cross-ice only; full-ice games are not permitted.
- U9 starts as half-ice and transitions to three-quarter cross-ice; optional full-ice exhibition/tournament games (beginning December 26) are capped at 12 games per season.
- No team at U7 or U9 names captains or assistant captains.
- Tournament formats do not use scores or standings; games are scheduled and played without a champion being declared.
- Goaltender and position rotation are mandatory at U9; two goaltenders dress per game on a documented rotation.
- Coaches are responsible for board/bumper set-up, flood transitions, and tear-down at U9, following Hockey Calgary's divider board procedures.
- Coaches must complete Coach 1, The Shift Forward (Coach), and Safety Program requirements by November 15.
- Game and tournament maximums for U7 and U9 are strictly enforced; see sections 1.2 and 2.4.

Coaching Qualifications:

All coaches must be certified by November 15 of the current season. Certifications can be found by clicking [here](#).

Category Detail

U7	Who requires qualification: 1 coach per 10 players
	Required online clinics: Hockey Canada Coach 1 and U7 Player Pathway
	Required In-person clinics: Hockey Alberta Coach 1 – Intro to Hockey
	Safety Clinic: 1 coach per 10 players
	The Shift Forward (Coach): All Team Officials
U9	Who requires qualification: 1 coach per 10 players
	Required online clinics: Hockey Canada Coach 1 and U9 Player Pathway
	Required In-person clinics: Hockey Alberta Coach 1 – Intro to Hockey
	Safety Clinic: 1 coach per 10 players
	The Shift Forward (Coach): All Team Officials
	Other notes/recommendations: Hockey Canada Skills – Checking and Hockey Alberta – Intro to Principles of Coaching

Core Rules for U7 and U9

Tournament Format

Tournament Type	Games per Team	Format
4-team	3	Round robin
5-team	4	Round robin

Important: No scores or standings are recorded. The complete schedule must be established before the tournament begins. U7 does not participate in Esso Minor Hockey Week. Hockey Calgary hosts the U7 Timbits Jamboree at the end of February as the season-ending event.

Equipment

Equipment	Requirement / Use
Blue puck	Required for all U7 games. Required for all half-ice U9 games.
Black puck	May be used for three-quarter and/or full-ice U9 games when both coaches agree.
Small nets	3' x 4' nets are mandatory where available.

Equipment	Requirement / Use
Hard boards / bumpers	Should be positioned at the red line for half-ice and the blue line for Three-Quarter. The Flames Foundation-supported hard-board system is used at most rinks.
Set-up	Boards and bumpers may only be set up or moved by certified coaches wearing helmets. Skates are strongly recommended.

Special Rules

<u>Area</u>	<u>Rule</u>
Team Leadership	Teams must not designate a captain or alternate captain for games.
Informal Games During Practice	Coaches may use up to 33% of practice time for informal games within their Member Club, where permitted by their club.

On-Ice Coach

Requirements

Category	Requirement
Responsibility	Board/bumpers set-up, flood transition, and tear-down are the responsibility of team coaches, not officials or arena staff.
Personnel	A minimum of 3–4 certified coaches is required: 2 home + 2 away is best practice.
Authorization	Only certified and registered coaches may be on the ice for board/bumpers handling.
Safety Equipment	Helmets are mandatory when handling boards/bumpers.
Skates	Skates are recommended, with a minimum of 2 coaches on skates.
Resources	For additional board/bumpers procedures and the instructional video, see the Rink Divider Board System Procedures .

Questions & Support

Governor and League Chair Contact

For questions regarding league operations, schedules, or game play, please contact your Governor or League Chair: [Governor & League Chair Contact Information](#)

Member Club

For questions specific to your team or member club, please contact your Member Club directly.

1. U7 TIMBITS PROGRAM (AGES 5–6)

Teams are generally divided into Jr. Timbits (typically first-year players) and Sr. Timbits (typically second-year players). Teams are evenly balanced; tiering is not used at U7. U7 is cross-ice only and full-ice games are not permitted.

U7 Coach Quick Start

- Cross-ice only: practices and games use modified ice; full-ice games are not permitted for U7 Timbits.
- Game format: 4v4 plus 2 acting goalies; shifts are 1.5 minutes and acting goalies rotate back to player after each shift.
- No officials, penalties, posted scores, or game sheets; coaches manage possession changes and keep play moving.
- Evaluations must be conducted on half-ice; member clubs are encouraged to look beyond game play when sorting players.
- Recommended roster size is 18 players (range 17–20) to support multiple cross-ice games and acting goalies on each ice session.



U7 Practice and Game Structure

<u>Practice Component</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Focus</u>
FUN Warm-Up	10 min.	Movement, engagement and fun
Individual Skill Development	40 min.	Skating, stickhandling, passing and shooting
Cross-Ice Games	10 min.	Small-area games and game-based skill development
Total	60 min.	

<u>Element/Structure</u>	<u>U7 Format</u>
Playing Format	4v4 + 2 acting goalies
Acting Goalies	No goalie equipment; rotate to a player after each shift
Shift Length	90 seconds
Officials	No officials
Penalties	No penalties
Score / Standings	No score is posted or standings maintained
Game Sheets	No game sheets
Possession Changes	Coaches manage possession changes directly
Playing Surface	Cross-ice only; full-ice games are not permitted

Evaluation

- Evaluations must be conducted using a half-ice format.
- Member Clubs are encouraged to consider more than game play when evaluating and sorting players.

Roster Size

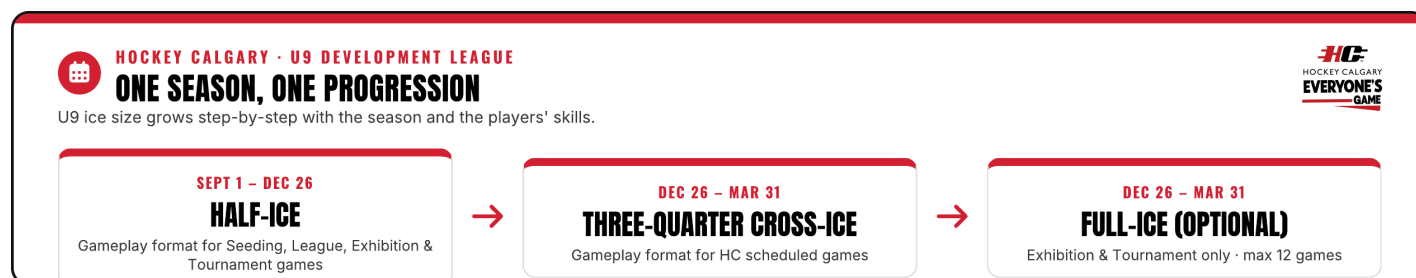
Hockey Calgary recommends a roster of 18 players, with a range of 17–20 players, to support 2–3 cross-ice games plus acting goalies during each ice session.

U7 Season & Game Limits

Seasonal Detail	U7 Jr. Timbits (1st Year)	U7 Sr. Timbits (2nd Year)
Informal games / scrimmages	Permitted: Season start → Nov. 27	Permitted: Season start → Nov. 13
Formal games	Maximum: 16 Deadline: Feb. 21	Maximum: 18 Deadline: Feb. 21
Total games	Maximum: 20 Includes 8 HC-scheduled games	Maximum: 24 Includes 8 HC-scheduled games
Tournaments / Jamborees	Maximum: 2 HC Jamboree excluded Out-of-town: Max. 1	Maximum: 3 HC Jamboree excluded Out-of-town: Max. 1
Sanctioning opens	Nov. 28	Nov. 14

U7 teams have limits on both formal games and total games. Tournament limits are separate from the HC Jamboree, and out-of-town tournaments are limited to one per season.

U9 DEVELOPMENT LEAGUE (AGES 7–8)



Skills-based category with 4 tiers. All positions (defense, forward, goaltender) must be rotated equitably across the season in practices, exhibition, and league games. No team names a captain or assistant captain. Coaches may use up to 33% of practice ice time to scrimmage. All game play is continuous expect for injury stoppage.

U9 Coach Quick Start

- Seeding and league games: half-ice from Sept 1–Dec 26 → three-quarter cross-ice from Dec 26–Mar 31.
- Optional full-ice exhibition and tournament games (5v5 plus a goaltender) are capped at 12 per team per season.
- Half-ice: 4v4 with a goaltender at each end, two face-offs (start of game and second half), 90 second shifts, no offsidess or icing.
- Three-quarter cross-ice: 5v5 in the larger zone plus a cross-ice 3v3 with 2 acting goalies, shared clock, no offsidess or icing.
- Full-ice: 5v5 plus one dressed goaltender, 90 second shifts, no official score posted, blue puck default unless both coaches agree to use black.

U9 Game Format Season Progression

Time of Season	Seeding / League Games	Exhibition / Tournament Games
Sept. 1 – Dec. 26	Half-Ice	Half-Ice
Dec. 26 – Mar. 31	Three-Quarter Cross-Ice	Half-Ice, Three-Quarter Cross-Ice, or Full-Ice*
Esso Minor Hockey Week	Three-Quarter Cross-Ice 2 games scheduled No champion declared	N/A

*Remember: U9 league games transition from Half-Ice to Three-Quarter Cross-Ice on Dec. 26. Full-Ice games are not permitted for regular league play and are limited to optional exhibition and tournament games, with a maximum of 12 per season.

2.2 Gameplay Structure

At-a-Glance Game Formats

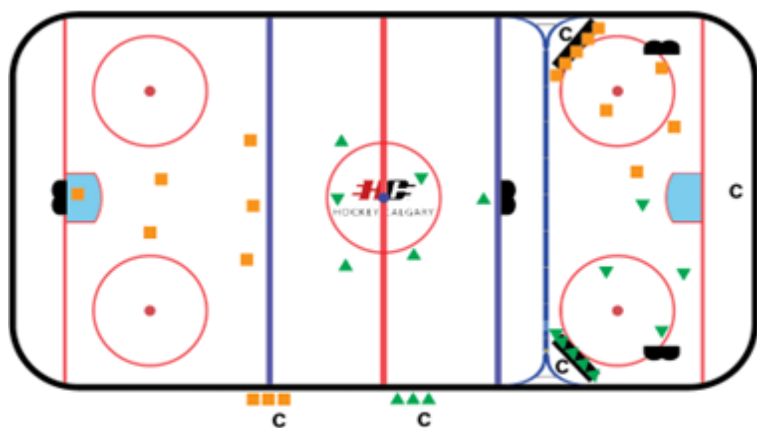
Game Format	Players	Goaltenders	Gameplay Area
Half-Ice	4 vs. 4	1 goalie/team	Half-Ice
Three-Quarter Cross-Ice	5-player format; cross-ice game is 3 vs. 3	Acting goaltenders in cross-ice game	Three-Quarter Ice + Cross-Ice
Full-Ice	5 vs. 5 + goalie	1 dressed goalie/team	Full-Ice

Half-Ice

Rule / Feature	Requirement
Players	4 vs. 4
Goaltenders	1 goaltender per team
Face-Offs	2 total — one to start the game and one to start the second half
Offside / Icing	No offside; no icing
Shift Length	90 seconds
Change Signal	Buzzer signals players to change
Scoring/ Timekeeping	Online game sheets completed with total score but do not count for standings. Main score clock is used as the timekeeping device.
Roster Formation	Teams remain evenly balanced during the seeding round. Following the seeding round, teams may use the A/B roster formation if both coaches agree.

Three-Quarter Cross-Ice

Rule / Feature	Requirement
Format	Three-quarter ice format with a simultaneous cross-ice game
Players	5-player format; cross-ice game operates 3 vs. 3
Goaltenders	Acting goaltenders are used in the cross-ice game, 1 goaltender per team in the three-quarter game
Face-Offs	2 total — one to start the game and one to start each period
Offside / Icing	No offside; no icing
Shift Length	90 seconds
Change Signal	Buzzer signals players to change
Scoring/Timekeeping	Online game sheets completed with total score but do not count for standings. Main score clock is used as the timekeeping device for both games simultaneously.
Roster Formation	Teams remain evenly balanced during Three-Quarter Cross-Ice play.



Three Quarter – Cross Ice Game

Full-Ice — Optional Exhibition/Tournament

<u>Rule / Feature</u>	<u>Requirement</u>
Players	5 vs. 5 + goaltender per team
Goaltenders	Maximum 1 dressed goaltender per team
Face-Offs	Face-off to start each period
Post-Goal Face-Off	Optional
Puck	Blue puck is the default. Black puck may be used only when both coaches agree.
Scoring/Timekeeping	Online game sheets completed with total score but do not count for standings. Main score clock is used as the timekeeping device for both games simultaneously.
Shift Length	90 seconds
Nets	Small nets are recommended

2.3 Time Slot Structure

<u>Game Timing</u>	<u>Half-Ice</u>	<u>Three-Quarter Cross-Ice</u>
Warm-up / Set-up	5 min.	5 min.
Period 1	24 min.	15 min.
Rest / Change ends	3 min.	3 min.
Period 2	24 min.	15 min.
Rest / Change ends	—	3 min.
Period 3	—	15 min.
Shake hands / Move boards	3 min.	3 min.

U9 Game Format: Regular league play is Half-Ice from September 1–December 25 and transitions to Three-Quarter Cross-Ice on December 26. Full-Ice games are not permitted for regular league play and are limited to optional exhibition and tournament games, to a maximum of 12 per season. Teams can begin optional full-ice play beginning on December 26.

2.4 U9 Seasonal Structure

<u>Category</u>	<u>Detail</u>
	35 total games (Sept.–Mar.)
	• 6 seeding games
	• 10 regular-season games
Game Maximum	• 2 EMHW games
	• Additional tournament / exhibition games as permitted
	Maximum of 28 games through February 21.
Tournament / Jamboree	
Maximum	• 3 total tournaments/jamborees (approximately 9–12 games)
	• Maximum 2 out-of-town



Category	Detail
	None scheduled before the seeding round is complete
Exhibition Games	Approximately 2 additional games
Roster Size	Hockey Calgary recommends 17–19 players

2.5 Tiering & Reseeding

Area	Process
Tiering System	A 4-tier system is used. The seeding grid is adjusted based on the total number of registered teams to determine the appropriate number of divisions.
Seeding Round	Teams are placed into divisions based on seeding-round results.
Reseeding Requests	Reseeding requests must be submitted by the third week of November to your member Club and League Chair.
Reseeding Process	Hockey Calgary reviews reseeding requests and seeding-round results. The reseeding process runs through the end of November.
Division Adjustments	Hockey Calgary reserves the right to adjust the division structure after registration to maintain balanced divisions, including adding or removing divisions where required.

U9 Seeding Grid

Total Registered Teams	Div 1	Div 2	Div 3	Div 4	Total
2	-	1	-	1	2
4	1	1	1	1	4
6	1	2	2	1	6
8	2	2	2	2	8
10	2	3	3	2	10
12	3	3	3	3	12
14	3	4	4	3	14

Division Structure: The division grid is adjusted based on the number of registered teams. Teams are distributed as evenly as possible across the four divisions, with the strongest divisions containing the greatest number of teams when an even split is not possible.

2.6 Goaltender Rotation

Category	Requirement
Goaltenders Per Game	2 goaltenders must dress for each game.
Rotation	Goaltender assignments must follow a mandatory, documented rotation using the Goaltender Rotation Form.
Roster Rotation	The rotation must include every player on the roster once before any player repeats.
Tracking	Rotation must be tracked using parent/player sign-off.
EMHW Exception	During Esso Minor Hockey Week, a player may play goaltender out of rotation. All other players must catch up in the rotation afterward.
Extra Attacker	Goaltenders may not be pulled for an extra skater.

2.8 Officiating

Officiating Responsibilities

Area	U9 Approach
Officials	Officials are typically 13–14 years old and are developing their officiating skills.
Development Focus	Face-offs, foundational positioning, skating, penalty signals, and communication.
Offside / Icing	Offside and icing are not called during U9 small-area play. These rules are introduced with full-ice play.
Game Stoppages	Officials manage possession changes resulting from goalie freezes, the puck leaving play, penalties, and goals.
3-Metre Back-Off	Officials enforce the 3-metre back-off requirement.
Minor Penalties	No time penalty is served. The offending player sits out the next shift only, while play remains 4-on-4.
Mentorship	Senior officials may mentor newer U9 officials through on-ice shadowing or observation/evaluation from the stands.

Supporting Our Officials

U9 officials are learning and developing their skills. Please support them with patience, encouragement, and positive feedback. Creating positive experiences helps officials build confidence, develop their skills, and continue in the game.

Behaviour & Safe Sport Expectations

- Coaches, players, and parents are always expected to model respect for officials, recognizing that most U9 officials are in their first seasons on the ice.
- Bench behaviour should reflect Hockey Calgary's values: no yelling at officials, opponents, other players and/or spectators; coaches correct concerns calmly and through appropriate channels after the game.
- Dressing-room supervision, injury response, and travel conduct must follow your member club's Safety Program requirements; when in doubt, seek guidance from your club or league contacts.

3. U11 TRANSITION PLAN

The transition from U9 to full-ice U11 hockey is supported through four stages throughout the year:

Transition Stage	Timing	Requirement	Key Details
In-Season Transition	During U9 season	Required	Three-Quarter Cross-Ice introduces full-ice concepts, including stoppages and starts, offside, icing, changing on the fly, and offensive/defensive zone awareness.
End-of-Season Transition	Feb. 1 – Apr. 14	Required for member clubs	Beginning in 2026–27, all member clubs must provide transition skates for graduating U9 players, including House League. Minimum 3 sessions; sessions must include instruction and cannot be gameplay-only. No additional fee may be charged.
Spring-Season Transition	Spring season	Optional	Additional-fee programming may be offered by individual member clubs.
Pre-Season U11 Pathway Skates	Fall, before U11 evaluations	Required	Minimum of 4 pathway/prep skates must be provided before the start of U11 evaluations.

4. SEASON KEY DATES AT A GLANCE

DATE	U7	U9
Sept. 28	Coach Meeting – 6:00 p.m.	Coach Meeting – 7:30 p.m.
Nov. 9	Hockey Calgary Coach Day Seminar	Hockey Calgary Coach Day Seminar



DATE	U7	U9
Nov. 13 / 27	Informal games end (Sr. / Jr.)	—
Nov. 14 / 28	Sanctioning opens (Sr. / Jr.)	—
Nov. 15	Coaching certification deadline	Coaching certification deadline; reseeding requests due
Early Nov.	—	Reseeding process
		HC-scheduled games transition to Three-Quarter Cross-Ice
Dec. 26	—	Optional Full-Ice exhibition/tournament games open (maximum 12 per season)
Feb. 1 – Apr. 14	—	U11 transition skate window opens
Feb. 21	Maximum-games window ends (16/18 formal games)	Maximum-games window ends (28 games)
Feb. 22	End-of-season phase begins	—
Feb. 27	U7 Timbits Jamboree	—
Mar. 31	Season ends	Season ends. U11 transition skates may begin.