

PARENT FAQ

Q: Why doesn't U9 play full ice like when I was a kid?

Hockey Canada's national policy (LTPD) mandates half-ice/cross-ice play at U7 and U9 because it builds better foundational hockey skills including more puck touches, faster decision-making, stronger skating agility than full-ice play at this age. This isn't a Hockey Calgary preference; it's the national standard across hockey in Canada.

Q: Will my child fall behind players who play full ice elsewhere?

No research shows the opposite. NHL stars like Connor McDavid and Sidney Crosby rely on agility and direction changes, not straight-line speed which is exactly what half-ice hockey trains. The Three-Quarter Cross-Ice phase, Full-ice phase, and U11 Transition Plan are designed to create an appropriate and stepwise transition into full-ice hockey.

Q: When does my child move to full ice?

U9 players progress in-season from Half-Ice (Sept–Dec 26) to Three-Quarter Cross-Ice, which introduces offside, icing, and changing on the fly. Starting 2026-27, clubs also run optional no-fee transition skates (Feb 1–Apr 14) before the move to full-ice U11.

Q: Why is there no full-ice option earlier in the season?

As per Hockey Canada regulations, full ice cannot begin prior to December 26 of the current season. A capped number of full-ice exhibition and tournament games (max 12) is permitted only after December 26, once players have had a full season of half-ice skill-building, so they're ready for the bigger surface, not overwhelmed by it. The number is meant to balance real exposure to the bigger ice surface with enough time still spent on half-ice fundamentals, so players get a taste of full-ice hockey without leaving the skill building that got them there behind too soon.

Q: Should players and/or teams be tiered?

Grouping players of similar ability helps set kids up for success and enjoyment. Hockey Calgary uses a 4-tier system at U9, so practices and games stay age and skill-appropriate for every player. Hockey Calgary does not tier players at U7. Players are split by birth years into Jr. and Sr. Timbits.

Q: What are the advantages of practicing in small areas and playing half-ice games?

Small spaces equate to more engagement in the play, and activity for young players. Through small area station-based practices and half ice games, players are closer to the play and have much more opportunity to be engaged in the game. Regardless of the skill level or the ability of each player, opportunities to be engaged in the play double when the playing area is smaller. The NHL Analytics research illustrated that all



HOCKEY CALGARY

skill areas of the game increased substantially when players played in small spaces more suited to their age and skill level.

Q: What do parents need to do to get ready?

Along with registering your player, every U7 household needs one parent to complete Hockey Canada's Respect in Sport parent program, a short online course. Coaches complete their own certification too, including Respect in Sport for coaches and a Safety Program course, before they're allowed on the ice with your team.

Q: How is my child evaluated and placed on a team?

Each Member Club runs its own evaluation process, so the exact steps vary a little by association, but every evaluation happens on half ice and looks at both skills and game play. At U9, those evaluations place players into one of four tiers, using a seeding grid that keeps tiers balanced across Hockey Calgary. At U7, there's no tiering. Clubs instead balance skill levels evenly across every team within the Jr. and Sr. Timbits groups.

Q: What's the weekly time commitment?

Plan on roughly one practice and one game most weeks through the season. U9 players play up to 28 games by late February and up to 35 for the full season including tournaments, while U7 players play a set number of formal games capped by age group. Exact practice and game schedules come from your Member Club.

Q: What is Hockey Calgary doing to keep my child safe?

Every coach completes Hockey Canada's Respect in Sport certification and a Safety Program course before working with a team. If you ever have a concern about your child's experience, your Member Club's registrar or head coach is the best first call, and they can point you to the right next step.