# U9 GAMEPLAY PROGRESSION

**Purpose:** To provide a clear, developmentally appropriate progression from skill development to half-ice play and, later, full-ice play.

## SEASONAL GAMEPLAY PROGRESSION

| Stage | Dates | Game format | What applies |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | Season start - Oct. 31 | **Skill development** | Practices only; no games. |
| **2** | Nov. 1 - Dec. 25 | **Half-ice games** | Half-ice games may begin. Full-ice games are not permitted. |
| **3** | Dec. 26 - Feb. 14 | **Full-ice introduction** | Standard full-ice format and U9 playing rules apply. |
| **4** | Feb. 15 - Season end | **Progressive full-ice** | Optional rule adaptations may be used when both coaches agree before the game. |

## SEASON-WIDE STANDARDS

- No games may be played before November 1 of the current season.
- Teams may play a maximum of 40 games during the season, including jamboree games.
- No score is kept.
- Full-ice games may not begin before December 26.
- Goaltending equipment should be rotated among players who wish to try the position.

## STAGE 2: HALF-ICE GAMES | NOVEMBER 1 - DECEMBER 25

### Game Format

- Half-ice games may begin on November 1. Full-ice games are not permitted during this stage.
- It is recommended that the game is played 4 v 4, however teams are asked to used their discrepancy based on number of participants on each team.
- Two 22 to 26-minute halves, with two-minute break a halftime
- Shifts are two minutes in length
- One Hockey New Brunswick official is required for each half-ice game.
- Officials should emphasize the flow of play. Stoppages should be kept to a minimum to maximize playing time.
- Smaller 3 ft. x 4 ft. nets are recommended when available.

## STAGE 3: STANDARD FULL-ICE PLAY | DECEMBER 26 - FEBRUARY 14

### Game Format

- 5-on-5 play.
- Three-minute warm-up.
- Two 22- to 26-minute halves, with a two-minute break at halftime.
- Two officials are recommended for each full-ice game.
- Offsides and icing will be called, with leniency appropriate to the U9 level.

### Face-Offs and Goaltender Covers

- Face-offs take place at the start of each half and after goals, offsides and icings.
- When a goaltender covers the puck, the official should encourage the goaltender to play the puck so play can continue.

### Shifts and Line Changes

- Shifts are two minutes and are regulated by a buzzer or whistle.
- When the buzzer or whistle signals a shift change, players must leave the puck and return to the bench.
- A player who is double shifting must tag up at the bench before rejoining play

### Penalties

- The official signals a minor penalty by briefly raising an arm, then stops play.
- The penalized player returns to the bench. The coach is responsible for discussing the infraction with the player before the player's next shift.
- The penalized team plays short-handed for the remainder of the shift and returns to 5-on-5 at the start of the next shift.

### Pucks, Nets and Goaltending Equipment

- A shooter tutor should be available if a team is unable to dress a goaltender.
- Goaltenders must wear the required neck protector attached to their helmet during games.

## STAGE 4: PROGRESSIVE FULL-ICE PLAY | FEBRUARY 15-SEASON END

Beginning February 15, the following adaptations may be introduced **only when both coaches agree before the game**:

- Minor penalties may be two minutes and served in the penalty box.
- The buzzer may be removed to introduce line changes on the fly.
- The progressive full-ice play must be established by coaches before game time.
- Jamboree organizers must communicate the U9 playing rules to participating teams before any jamboree beginning February 15 or later.

> **Important:** If both coaches do not agree to an adaptation, the standard U9 full-ice rules remain in effect.

# COACHING AND EQUIPMENT CONSIDERATIONS

## Net Selection

Coaches are to use their discretion when selecting the type and size of net for each game, based on the level of play and the availability of different-sized nets.

## Research-Informed Decisions

Coaches should be aware of current research regarding the benefits and developmental outcomes of the different game formats used at the U9 level.

- https://cdn.hockeycanada.ca/hockey-canada/Hockey-Programs/Coaching/u9-program/downloads/2026/u9-player-pathway-e.pdf
- https://blob.iihf.com/iihf-media/iihfmvc/media/downloads/sport%20files/development-guide/player-development-guide/sag-study-fihaandsiha_growingthegame_2020_6_17.pdf

## Developmental Emphasis

- Maximize participation, puck touches and meaningful involvement for every player.
- Use the progression to support skill development and confidence as players move toward full-ice play.
- Keep instruction age-appropriate and use stoppages as teaching opportunities.

> **Coach reminder:** The purpose of the progression is player development. Decisions about optional adaptations should reflect the readiness and needs of the players in that game.