

# Neck Laceration Protection: What You Need To Know

→ By Charles A. Popkin, MD

**Q:** *My oldest child plays 16U hockey, my middle plays 12U, and my youngest plays 10U. I want to make sure I am compliant with the new neck laceration protection rule so my kids stay safe on the ice. I am overwhelmed by the number of options. Can you tell me what I should look for when buying the new equipment? Help!*

– Hockey Mom in Connecticut

**A:** The USA Hockey Congress approved legislation in January that requires neck laceration protection for players in all age classifications, other than adults, as well as for on-ice officials under the age of 18. This requirement is for both games and practices. While not required, USA Hockey continues to strongly recommend the use of NLPs for adult players.

The USA Hockey Safety and Protective Equipment Committee has long recommended the use of neck laceration protection, as well as cut-resistant socks, sleeves, and undergarments.

The goal of the new requirement is aimed at reducing the risk of this rare but potentially catastrophic injury.

The new neck laceration protection rule represents a step forward in player safety. Through implementation of these required protective measures, the hockey community is helping to keep its players safe by minimizing the risk of neck lacerations in upcoming seasons.

## Why Is Wearing A Neck Laceration Protector Important?

There are several major blood vessels in the neck that run just below the surface of the skin, making them vulnerable to injury when a person suffers neck trauma. Lacerations to the neck may sever these vessels, resulting in rapid and potentially fatal blood loss. The airway is also vulnerable to a deep laceration. Other complications of neck lacerations may include a stroke that may lead to permanent disability. The introduction of mandatory neck protection aims to mitigate these risks.

## THE WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, AND WHY OF NLPs

**Who?** Players in all age classifications, other than adults, and on-ice officials under the age of 18.

**What's the best one?** Select a properly fitting, unaltered NLP that is made from cut-resistant material and minimizes the amount of exposed neck.

**When?** Every time a player gets on the ice for a game or practice.

**Where do I get one?** Purchase at any store or online hockey retailer.

**Why?** To minimize the risk of serious neck injury from a skate blade.



If you have questions for Dr. Hockey, please email [Justin.Felisko@usahockey.org](mailto:Justin.Felisko@usahockey.org)



## Which NLP Should You Wear?

There are various types of neck laceration protectors available, ranging from simple, wrap-around, cut-resistant fabric NLPs to more sophisticated designs integrated into base-layer shirts.

I would advise looking for the following when selecting an NLP:

**Cut Resistance:** The primary function of the NLP is to prevent skate blades from cutting the neck. This requires that the garment be made from a material that cannot be easily cut by a sharp blade.

**Fit:** Properly fitted NLPs will stay in place during play and provide consistent protection.

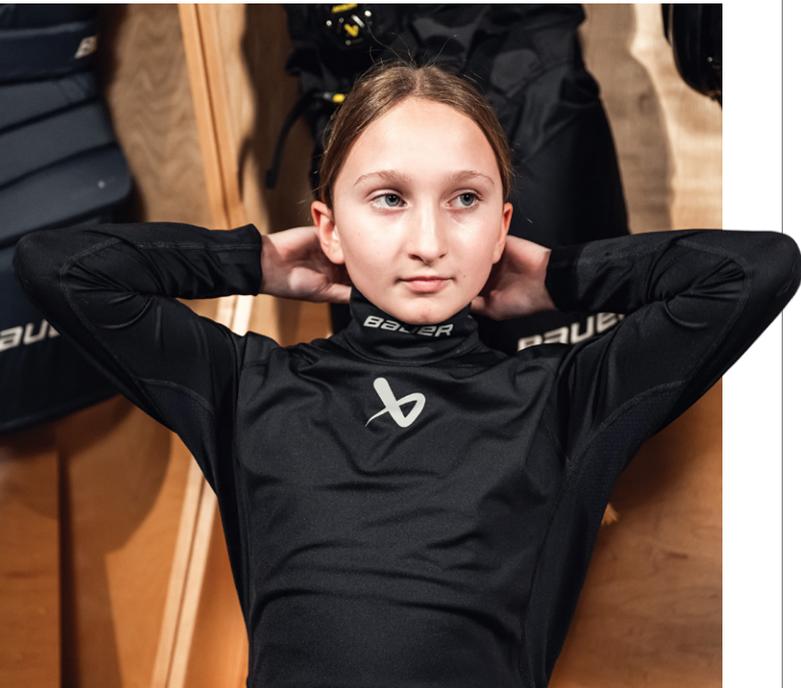
**Coverage:** The NLP should cover as much of the neck as possible. The parts of the neck that remain exposed will remain vulnerable to injury. You should never attempt to alter the protector.

No piece of equipment can be 100% successful in preventing injuries; however, wearing an NLP that is cut-resistant, fits properly and minimizes the amount of exposed neck will decrease the risk of injury from a skate blade.

## Rule Implementation & Compliance (Coaches and Organizations)

During the upcoming season, youth hockey teams and organizations will need to ensure adherence to the new NLP requirement.

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**Educating Players:** Players and families must be adequately informed of the importance of neck protection and the specifics of the new requirement.

**Assessing Compliance:** Regular monitoring is essential to ensure that every player is wearing the required neck protection during all games and practices. A player who is not wearing this required equipment will receive a warning and be sent off the ice. If the player returns to the ice without an NLP, this second violation will result in a game misconduct penalty.

**Respond to Incidents:** Organizations must be prepared to effectively manage skate blade lacerations with first aid and emergency response protocols. Every hockey association is strongly encouraged to have an emergency action plan in place. ☆

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