

# **USA HOCKEY**

## **SPECIAL HOCKEY PLAYING RULES**

### **2025-2029**

Published in Appendix VI of the [USA Hockey 2025-2029 Official Rules of Ice Hockey](#)

#### **PREFACE**

Special hockey aims to give people with cognitive and/or developmental disabilities the chance to play ice hockey in an environment adapted to their level of ability. Special Hockey emphasizes having fun through teamwork and social interaction and improving the quality of life through on- and off-ice activities.

#### **ELIGIBILITY**

Individuals with developmental disabilities experience limitations in three or more major core life competencies (and cannot safely or socially play on a typical hockey team): capacity for independent living, economic self-sufficiency, learning, mobility, receptive and expressive language, and self-care/direction. Many players are adults who lack these core competencies, thus allowing them to remain on the same Special hockey team for many years. Common developmental disabilities include Autism Spectrum disorders, Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, ADD/ADHD, Seizures, Neurological disorders, and intellectual/developmental disabilities.

#### **RINK**

All Special Hockey games are played on a regulation-sized ice hockey rink.

#### **EQUIPMENT/UNIFORMS**

All players must wear full protective equipment for their position, as outlined by Rules 303 and 304 in the Official Rules of Ice Hockey, including HECC-certified full facial protection.

#### **ASSISTIVE SKATING DEVICES**

Assistive skating devices of any kind are not permitted during games.

#### **TEAM**

A Special Hockey team has five skaters and a goalkeeper on the ice, the same as typical hockey. Roster size limitations are the same as a typical ice hockey team. Rosters can be

comprised of all youth-aged players (players under 18), all adult-aged players (players 18 and older), or mixed youth and adult-aged players. Players are rated as A, B and C based on their playing ability.

#### A Level

- Able to skate unassisted
- Able to play at a faster pace
- Able to play structured game with minimal to no assistance
- Has more advanced hockey skills
- Has better understanding of game rules and concepts
- Able to follow rules/instruction/drills
- Always engaged in the play
- Has the ability to change shifts on the fly
- Needs no prompting
- On-ice helpers are not permitted at this level

#### B Level

- Able to skate unassisted
- Able to play at a mid-level pace
- Able to play structured game with minimal assistance
- Has mid-level hockey skills
- Has a basic understanding of game rules and concepts
- Able to follow rules/instruction/drills (occasional prompting may be needed)
- Mostly engaged in the play
- May need assistance in positioning
- May need occasional prompting
- On-ice helpers at this level are not permitted to have sticks on the ice. They must wear helmets in accordance with USA Hockey rules. They must be listed on the roster.

#### C Level

- May need assistance in skating
- Able to play at a slower pace
- Needs assistance to play a structured game
- Has lower level hockey skills
- Has limited understanding of game rules and concepts
- Has difficulty following rules/instruction/drills
- May need some/constant prompting to engage in the play
- Needs assistance in positioning
- On-ice helpers at this level are not permitted to have sticks on the ice. They must wear helmets in accordance with USA Hockey rules. They must be listed on the roster.

## **PLAYING RULES/PENALTIES**

Each coach should attempt to match lines with similarly skilled players from the other team.

The more skilled players on one team should be matched with players of the same skill level on the other team.

At the lower skilled levels, if a team has an odd number of players and requests to skate eight players on a line instead of five, they must ask permission from the opposing coach and inform the referee before the start of the game.

Special effort should be made to control an "A" level player playing in a "B" game not to ruin it for the rest of the players. No player should be double shifted if it can be helped.

During any game at the lower skill level or where the outcome is lopsided and the coaches agree, the referee can award extra penalty shots to help improve the game and give some players a chance to shoot on net. The coaches can designate which players get the shot.

Coaches should rate players/teams appropriately.

Games/event organizers must match teams by ability whenever possible.

Coaches are encouraged to meet before each game to discuss match-ups and stoppages of play (offsides, icings, faceoffs, or whether teams in the defensive zone carry out the puck). Coaches must include the referees in this discussion to ensure consistency in game management.

### A Level Games

- Game length is 75 minutes
- Each team may have five skaters and one goaltender on the ice during the play unless the goalkeeper is pulled for an extra attacker.
- No coaches are permitted on the ice (unless for safety purposes).
- Players should not be double-shifted, if possible.
- Players change on the fly.
- Faceoffs occur after a goal or if the goalkeeper ties up the puck.
- Score shall be kept (maximum 4 goal difference on the scoreboard).
- Penalties will result in a penalty shot. If possible, the penalty shot must be taken by the player who was interfered with. In addition to the penalty shot, a 1:30-second penalty may be served in the penalty box by the offending player if the referee or the player's coach thinks they should. At no time will any team serving a penalty have less than five skaters on the ice.

- Coaches are expected to try not to run up the score in a lopsided game.

### B Level Games

- Game length is 75 minutes
- Each team may have five skaters plus one goalkeeper on the ice during play (1 or 2 “roamers” may be on the ice with the coach’s consent).
- Two mentors are allowed on the ice but are not to interfere with the play.
- No player should be double shifted if it can be helped.
- Players change shifts on the buzzer (on the fly can be used if the coaches agree).
- Score shall be kept (maximum 4 goal difference on the scoreboard).
- A special effort should be made to control any “A” player playing in a “B” game to avoid any game domination at the expense of other players.
- Penalties will result in a penalty shot. If possible, the penalty shot must be taken by the player who was interfered with. In addition to the penalty shot, a 1:30-second penalty may be served in the penalty box by the offending player if the referee or the player’s coach thinks they should. At no time will any team serving a penalty have less than five skaters on the ice.
- The referee can award extra penalty shots to help improve the game and give some players a chance to shoot on the net (with the coach’s consent).
- Coaches are expected to try not to run up the score in a lopsided game.

### C Level Games

- Game level is 60 minutes
- Each team may have five skaters plus one goalkeeper on the ice during play (1 or 2 “roamers” may be on the ice with the coach’s consent).
- Three mentors are allowed on the ice and may assist in the play with the coach’s consent.
- Players change shifts on the buzzer.
- A scoreboard will be utilized, but each team will be awarded a goal when one team scores (the actual score may be kept with the coaches’ consent).
- A special effort should be made to control any “B” player playing in a “C” game to avoid any game domination at the expense of other players.
- Penalties will result in a penalty shot. Any player may take the penalty shot.
- The referee can award extra penalty shots to help improve the game and give some players a chance to shoot on the net (with the coaches’ consent.)

## **OFFICIALS**

USA Hockey-certified referees are to officiate all games.