



# A Proper Warm-Up Goes A Long Way

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**Q:** *Long-time hockey player and now a hockey dad wondering what you recommend for a warm-up routine before a 12U game. I see various teams doing many different things off ice to get ready to play. What's the best pre-game, warm-up activity for my kid?*

– Daniel M., Minneapolis

**A:** Ice hockey is an incredibly fast-paced sport. The physical demands on the body required to play are quite intense. Unlike other sports that allow a player to slowly acclimate to the game pace, hockey is full speed ahead immediately following puck drop! Therefore, it is not surprising that hockey coaches and players place a premium on being ready to go before they hit the ice.

There is an incredible amount of variability among youth hockey teams and organizations regarding pre-game, warm-up routines. Most players are at the rink anywhere from 45 to 60 minutes before gametime. You will find plenty of players and teams that do a short

jog and a few static stretches before heading to the locker room to get dressed. At the other extreme, I have seen coaches who require their players to engage in rigorous uphill sprints and cone drills to the point of breaking a heavy sweat before hitting the locker room.

While serving as the USA Hockey team physician for the recent 2024 IIHF Under-18 Men's World Championships in Finland, I had the privilege of working closely with Joe Meloni, head strength coach for USA Hockey's National Team Development Program, who graciously agreed to be a guest contributor for this article. There is arguably no one better suited to answer your question than the man responsible for ensuring the top players in youth hockey are ready to hit the ice!

**DR. HOCKEY:** What is the goal of the warm-up routine for a hockey player?

**JOE MELONI:** The goal of a successful warm-up routine is twofold: to make sure players are ready to dominate the game from the moment

they head over the boards, while, at the same time, reducing the risk of injury during play. We utilize the RAMP protocol, which is a very efficient and effective program that employs a specific sequence of pre-game exercises. The sequential nature is critical, as each phase optimizes performance in the subsequent phase.

**DR. HOCKEY:** Could you explain the RAMP protocol in more detail?

**JOE MELONI:** RAMP is an acronym that describes the goals of each of the four phases of the pre-game program. It is important to remember that this protocol requires the training exercises to be performed in a very precise order.

The truth is that there are many ways that athletes get ready to play, and a warm-up routine is no different. What matters most is that an athlete, or coach, choose exercises in each phase of the protocol to get their body ready to perform on the ice.

## RAMP stands for:



### Raise your heart rate

This can be done with activities such as jumping rope, jogging, riding a stationary bike, or running carioca drills, which involve cross-stepping movements that propel the body laterally. The "R" phase requires some form of active movement that will result in an elevated heart rate. By the end of the "R" phase, the athlete should be breaking a light sweat.



### Activate your key muscles

There are three exercises I really like for hockey players in this phase that do an excellent job of targeting the hips: hip lifts, split squats, and lunges. I recommend incorporating mini bands (i.e. small loop resistance bands) into these activities to add a boost to these strength-training exercises.



### Mobilize your joints

This is usually the phase that most athletes consider to be the goal of their warm-up routines. The goal here is to improve range of motion and function of the joints. It's important to be dynamic in this phase; passive stretching movements do not achieve the same goals. There are three exercises I have our kids focus on: Spiderman stretches, pigeon stretches, and groin rocks.



### Potentiate your nervous system

Many hockey players never consider this a crucial part of the warm-up routine. This is the phase where an athlete primes their body's nervous system to be ready for maximum output at gametime. The goal here is to generate power to make sure the body can fire when the player transitions to the ice. This involves active jumping and sprinting to recruit their muscles. My two go-to exercises for this phase are the alternating split squat jump and the 10-yard lateral sprint.



CLICK HERE to email your question for Dr. Hockey.



HERE'S A SHORTENED VERSION OF OUR **NTDP WARM-UP ROUTINE** THAT WOULD BE IDEAL FOR A 12U PLAYER.

Click red boxes to see video examples!

Typically, our team will start with a game of Sewerball or two-touch and then we start the warm-up.

## 10 YARDS

Jog with Arm Swing Forward

Jog with Arm Swing Backward

High Knees

Low Skip

High Skip

Shuffle Left/Right

Carioca Left/Right



### RAISE

## 10 REPS

Glute Bridge w/ Mini-Band

Mini-Band Walk Forward/Backward

Mini-Band Squat

Lateral Mini-Band Walk



### ACTIVATE

## 10 REPS

Alternating Spiderman Stretch

Alternating Pigeon Stretch

Groin Rock

T-Spine Rotation



### MOBILIZE

## 5 REPS

Medicine Ball (MB) Slam

Alternating Split Squat Jump R/L

10 YARDS

Lateral Sprint R/L



### POTENTIATE

CLICK for more age-appropriate instructional videos!

The takeaway point here is to use the structure of the RAMP protocol to create your own personalized warm-up program for your player to use at the rink. When considering various exercises to incorporate into your own protocol, keep in mind there is comfort in repetition and routine, and this will provide further benefit as your player prepares to skate his or her best on the ice. If you utilize the RAMP framework, making sure to incorporate all four phases in their specified order, your hockey player will be ready to maximally perform from the first whistle. ☆

#### Check Out These Additional Resources:

[Science For Sport Warm-Ups](#)

[What is the RAMP Warm-Up?](#)