# U5 (Under‑5) Soccer Guidelines (Indoor and Outdoor)

Cold Lake Minor Soccer (CLMS) runs grassroots programs that follow Canada Soccer’s Active‑Start model for children under five. At this age, the focus is on movement skills, fun, and socialization rather than competition. The information below combines Canada Soccer recommendations with small‑sided rules used by Alberta clubs and other North American programs. Citations show where key rules come from.

## **1 Program structure and philosophy**

* **Fun and development over results** – U‑5 players are usually four years old, often playing soccer for the first time. Programs emphasize enjoyment, movement, and learning to love the ball. CLMS does not record scores and does not track standings; kids should leave each practice or game smiling.
* **Two sessions per week** – CLMS schedules one practice and one game or “fun day” each week. Practices should last ≈45 minutes, allowing children to play freely and explore movement skills. Games/fun days are played on separate days to avoid fatigue. All Teams are Co‑ed teams. Teams WILL be assembled without try‑outs; each child should receive equal playing time. Coaches are encouraged to balance games by adding an extra player to the team that is losing by several goals.
* **Parents are partners** – At this age, many programs invite parents or guardians onto the field to help their child and to keep them comfortable. Encourage positive cheering and avoid instructions from the sidelines. Parents should not criticise coaches or players and must stay behind the spectator line and off the field of play.

## **2 Eligibility and roster size**

* **Age requirement** – U‑5 programs include children who are 5 or under, depending on birth date as specified by the league.
* **Roster size** – For 4‑v‑4 soccer, a team roster of 12 players is ideal. Teams divide into two groups and play side‑by‑side games, so all players get frequent touches.
* **Number of players on the field** – 4 players per team with no goalkeeper for U‑5.
* **Positioning** – There are no formal positions at this age. Coaches should encourage triangular shapes and basic principles like spreading out.

## **3 Field, ball, and equipment**

| Item | Recommendation |  |
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| **Field size** | Rectangular field 18‑22 m (20‑24 yd) wide × 30‑36 m (33‑40 yd) long[[12]](https://www.beaumontsoccer.com/resources/laws-of-soccer/#:~:text=Rule%201%20,have%20the%20following%20field%20sizes). Many programs set up two fields side‑by‑side (approx. 20 × 30 yd each) so two games can be played at once. |  |
| **Goal size** | Small portable goals ≈1.2 m × 1.8 m (4 ft × 6 ft) or up to 1.4 m × 2.7 m (4.5 ft × 9 ft). Pop‑up goals are common. |  |
| **Ball size** | **Size 3 ball** (circumference 23‑24 in, weight 11‑12 oz). Each player should have their own ball during practice. |  |
| **Footwear** | **Outdoor:** players wear shin guards under socks; cleats are optional, and in some Alberta leagues, U‑5 players are not permitted to wear cleats. **Indoor:** wear non‑marking running shoes or turf shoes; no outdoor cleats. |  |
| **Other equipment** | Jersey, shorts, socks (provided by the club); shin guards are mandatory. Players must remove jewellery and may wear knit hats and gloves in cold weather. Bring plenty of water and sunscreen in warm weather. |  |

## **4 Game format and laws of play (outdoor)**

1. **Match length** – Games should last about 40 minutes; the Beaumont Soccer Association’s U‑5 rules use two 20‑minute halves. Some programs split the time into four 10‑ or 12‑minute quarters to give players frequent breaks. Half‑time or quarter breaks should be no longer than five minutes.
2. **Kick‑off** – Begin the game and restart after a goal with a kick‑off from the centre. Opposing players must stand outside a 3‑yd radius. Teams alternate kick‑offs each half.
3. **Ball in and out of play** – When the ball crosses the sideline, restart with a kick‑in or throw‑in. Encourage kick‑ins because small players can struggle with throw‑ins. Use corner kicks when the ball crosses the goal line off a defender, and goal kicks when it crosses off the attacking team. Opponents should retreat to halfway during goal kicks.
4. **Scoring and restarts** – Goals can be scored from anywhere. There are no penalty kicks and no direct free kicks; No free kicks. There are no fouls at this age, just encouragement not to use their hands. There is no offside rule.
5. **Fouls and contact** – Teach basic rules but emphasise safety. Slide tackles and playing the ball from the ground are not allowed. Heading is not permitted. Coaches should briefly explain infractions to help players learn.
6. **Substitutions** – Use unlimited substitutions at any time. All players should play approximately the same amount of time.
7. **Referees and coaching** – Coaches act as field supervisors/referees. Keep the game flowing and help players restart play. Emphasise positive instruction and fairness.
8. **Keeping games balanced** – To avoid blow‑outs, if one team leads by 4 goals, the trailing team may add an extra player (5 v 4). If the lead reaches 6 goals, add two players (6 v 4). Coaches can impose restrictions on dominant players (use weaker foot, complete a number of passes before shooting).
9. **No scorekeeping** – Do not record scores or standings; remind parents and coaches that development and enjoyment are the priorities.

## **5 Indoor (boarded) soccer guidelines**

Cold Lake’s winter season is played on indoor pitches with boards. The general laws of the game remain, but some adaptations apply:

* **Session format** – Indoor U‑5 programs often run as 45‑minute sessions. Includes a 5‑minute warm‑up, 10‑minute small‑sided game, 15‑minute skill activities, and another 10‑minute game, with a cool‑down. CLMS can adopt a similar structure: short warm‑up, fun skill games with a ball for each child, small‑sided game (3‑v‑3 or 4‑v‑4), and a brief cool‑down. Parents may join their child on the field.
* **Field dimensions** – Indoor fields are usually smaller than outdoor fields; set up a playing area roughly 20 × 30 yards for 4‑v‑4 play, using boards to keep the ball in play. Many indoor games run two simultaneous fields side‑by‑side, just like outdoor micro‑soccer.
* **Footwear** – Players must wear flat‑soled running shoes or turf shoes; outdoor cleats are not permitted.
* **Safety around boards** – Teach players not to charge opponents into the boards. Players should keep one foot on the ground when playing balls along the wall and avoid using the boards to trap opponents.
* **Game rules** –
* **Kick‑ins** or **dribble‑ins** replace throw‑ins; the ball is kicked in from the sideline. Use corner kicks and goal kicks similar to outdoor rules.
* The ball remains in play when it rebounds off the boards; only stoppages are goals, fouls, or the ball hitting the ceiling.
* There are no goalkeepers and no offside.
* **Two 20‑minute halves** are typical; if playing four quarters, use 8‑ or 10‑minute quarters.
* **Spectators** – Parents and spectators must stay behind the glass/boards and avoid banging on the boards. Only coaches and players (and sometimes a parent helper) are allowed inside the playing area.

## **6 Practice guidelines and coaching tips**

* **Movement‑rich practices** – Provide each child with a ball and design activities that encourage running, dribbling, stopping, and turning. (e.g., “sharks and minnows”) to teach dribbling and spatial awareness.
* **Short attention spans** – Break the session into segments of 5–10 minutes. For example, start with a free play warm‑up, then a game‑like activity (e.g., dribbling through cones), followed by a small‑sided game.
* **Parent involvement** – Encourage parents to participate, especially in indoor sessions. This helps shy players and allows one‑on‑one attention.
* **Positive coaching** – Focus on encouragement rather than criticism. Address players by name, praise effort and good behaviour, and keep instructions simple. Avoid lines, lectures, or laps; instead, use demonstrations and let the ball be the teacher.

## **7 Weather and safety policies**

Cold Lake experiences variable weather. Coaches and parents must monitor conditions and follow safety procedures:

* **Hydration and heat** – AYSO’s weather‑safety policy notes that when temperatures and humidity rise, there is an increased risk of dehydration and heat illness. Organisers should allow frequent water breaks and schedule games outside the hottest part of the day. Encourage players to drink water before, during, and after sessions. Use shade and sunscreen on sunny days.
* **Cold weather** – The same policy recommends canceling or delaying games when cold weather poses risks of hypothermia or frostbite. Check field conditions; ice or snow can cause injuries. Players should be allowed to wear warm layers under their jerseys, as well as knit hats, gloves, or mittens. If players become wet, replace wet clothing with dry garments quickly. During Cold Lake’s winter, indoor play is preferred.
* **Thunder and lightning** – Have a lightning‑safety plan. When thunder is heard or lightning is seen, stop play immediately and move all participants to a substantial shelter. Games may resume only after 30 minutes without thunder.
* **Air quality** – If smoke or poor air quality becomes an issue (e.g., during forest‑fire season), the league should monitor local air‑quality indexes and cancel outdoor activities when necessary.

## **8 Administration and communications**

* **Scheduling** – Provide families with schedules well in advance. Avoid scheduling games during the hottest part of the day in summer and schedule indoor games during severe cold in winter. Ensure there are at least two hours between games for tournaments and no more than two games per day per player.
* **Volunteers and training** – Coaches are typically volunteers. Encourage them to take appropriate coaching courses (e.g., Canada Soccer’s Active‑Start coach education). Coaches must pass background checks and follow Safe Haven policies.
* **Communication** – Use email, team apps, or messaging systems to notify families of cancellations, schedule changes, and safety alerts. Provide a clear chain of command for weather‑related decisions.

## **9 Summary**

Cold Lake Minor Soccer’s U‑5 program aims to provide a safe, enjoyable, and development‑focused introduction to soccer. Children play 4‑v‑4 games on small fields with no goalkeepers, using size‑3 balls and wearing shin guards and comfortable footwear. The program emphasises fun, equal playing time, and positive experiences for players and parents. By following the guidelines above and adjusting for local conditions, CLMS can ensure young players have the best possible start in soccer.