**U7 (Under-7) Soccer Guidelines (Indoor and Outdoor)**

Cold Lake Minor Soccer (CLMS) runs grassroots programs for children under seven following Canada Soccer’s grassroots standards. At this age players are six years old and just beginning to understand the game. The focus remains on fun, movement, and basic skills rather than competition. The information below combines Canada Soccer recommendations with small-sided rules used by Canadian and North American programs.

# Program structure and philosophy

* **Fun and development over results** – U-7 players are usually six years old. Programs emphasise enjoyment, movement, and developing a relationship with the ball. Scores and standings are not kept; children should leave practices and games smiling.
* **Two sessions per week** – CLMS schedules one practice and one game or “fun day” each week. Practices should last about 45 minutes, giving children time to play freely and explore movement skills. Games/fun days are held on separate days to avoid fatigue. Teams are co-ed and assembled without try-outs, and every child should receive equal playing time. Coaches are encouraged to keep games balanced by adding an extra player to the trailing team when necessary.
* **Parents are partners** – Parents or guardians may be invited onto the field to help shy children. Encourage positive cheering and avoid tactical instructions from the sidelines. Parents must stay behind the spectator line and should not criticize coaches or players.

# Eligibility and roster size

* **Age requirement** – Under-7 programs typically include children who are six years old or turning seven during the season.
* **Roster size** – For 4-v-4 soccer, a roster of 10-12 players allows teams to split into two groups and ensures plenty of playing time. Some associations limit rosters to eight players.
* **Number of players on the field** – 4 players per team with no goalkeeper. Matches may start with three players if needed.
* **Positioning** – There are no fixed positions at this age. Coaches should encourage triangular shapes and simple formations (e.g., 1-2-1). Players should rotate through roles to develop all-round skills.

# Field, ball, and equipment

Item Recommendation

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Field size** | Rectangular field approximately 23–30 m (25–33 yd) wide × 30–40 m (33–44 yd) long. Some programs use 35 × 25 yd fields, while others use 30 × 40 yd fields. |
| **Goal size** | Small portable goals about 1.2 m × 1.8 m (4 ft × 6 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. |

Item Recommendation

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Footwear** | **Outdoor:** players wear shin guards under soccer socks; soccer cleats are recommended. **Indoor:** wear non-marking running shoes or turf shoes; outdoor cleats are not permitted. |
| **Other equipment** | Club-provided jerseys, shorts and socks; shin guards are mandatory.Players should remove jewellery and may wear knit hats and gloves in cold weather. Bring plenty of water and sunscreen in warm weather. |

# Game format and laws of play (outdoor)

1. **Match length** – Games typically last 40 minutes. Some programs divide this into four 10-minute quarters, while others use two 20minute halves. 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 remain outside a 4-yd radius. Teams alternate with kick-offs each half.
3. **Ball in and out of play** – When the ball crosses the sideline, restart play with a kick-in. Kick-ins are encouraged for younger players. 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 free kicks. 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 prohibited. Briefly explain infractions to help players learn.
6. **Substitutions** – Use unlimited substitutions at any time during stoppages. All players should play approximately the same amount of time.
7. **Referees and coaching** – Coaches act as supervisors and referees. Keep the game flowing and help players restart play. Emphasise positive instruction and fairness.
8. **Keeping games balanced** – If one team leads by four goals, the trailing team may add an extra player (making 5-v-4). If the lead reaches six goals, add two players. Coaches can also impose restrictions on dominant players (use weaker foot, complete a number of passes before shooting).
9. **No scorekeeping** – Do not record scores or standings; development and enjoyment are the priorities.

# 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-7 games are often played in two 20-minute halves with a 5-minute half-time break. Alternatively, shorter 45-minute sessions can include a warm-up, skill activities, and a small-sided game.
* **Field dimensions** – Set up a playing area roughly 70 ft × 35 ft (≈21 × 11 m) for 4-v-4 play, using boards to keep the ball in play. Many indoor programs 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** – The ball remains in play when it rebounds off the boards. When the ball hits the net or ceiling, award a kick-in at the point of contact. All restarts are indirect kicks. There are no goalkeepers and no offside rules.
* **Substitutions** – Each team has four players on the field and may have up to four substitutes. Substitutions are unlimited and can be made at any stoppage.
* **Spectators** – Parents and spectators must stay behind the glass or boards and avoid banging on the boards. Only coaches and players (and sometimes a parent helper) are allowed inside the playing area.

# Practice guidelines and coaching tips

* **Movement-rich practices** – Provide each child with a ball and design activities that encourage running, dribbling, stopping and turning. Use fun games like sharks-and-minnows, tag, or dribbling through cones. Include 1-v-1 and 2-v-2 activities.
* **Short attention spans** – Break the session into segments of 5–10 minutes. For example, start with free play, move to skill games, then play a small-sided game (3-v-3 or 4-v-4). Practices should last about 50–60 minutes.
* **Parent involvement** – Encourage parents to participate, especially with shy players. They can help with warm-ups or fun games and provide 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 and lectures; instead, demonstrate and let the ball be the teacher.
* **Balanced play** – Keep games competitive and fun. If one team leads by several goals, add players to the trailing team or require the stronger team to complete passes before shooting. Rotate players through different positions to build all-round skills.

# Weather and safety policies

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

* **Hydration and heat** – 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** – Cancel or delay 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. Indoor play is preferred in extreme cold.
* **Thunder and lightning** – Have a lightning-safety plan. When thunder is heard or lightning is seen, stop playing immediately and move participants to 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), monitor local air-quality indexes and cancel outdoor activities when necessary.

# 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 or Fundamentals courses). 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 commands for weather-related decisions.

# Summary

Cold Lake Minor Soccer’s U-7 program aims to provide a safe, enjoyable and development-focused environment for young players. Children play 4-v-4 games on small fields with no goalkeepers, using size-3 balls and wearing shin guards and suitable 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 help young players build fundamental soccer skills and a lifelong love of the game.