



OWHA Bulletin

To: All OWHA Members

From: OWHA

Date: 12/9/2019

Re: U7 (Initiation), U9 (Novice) and U11 (Atom) Player Pathway Implementation for 2020-2021

Beginning in the 2020-2021 season all Hockey Canada Members, including the Ontario Women's Hockey Association (OWHA), will be following the U11 (Atom) Player Pathway. Player Pathways, as we have seen with U7 (Initiation) and U9 (Novice) Programming are progressive, learn to play development guides that support the player development continuum from U7 (Initiation) through to U11 (Atom). The Pathways outline optimal seasonal structures and age appropriate development guidelines.

The U11 (Atom) Player Pathway consists of a policy and recommendations, all focusing on the appropriate development for 9 and 10-year-old players. The U11 (Atom) Pathway delivers a positive experience during evaluations by providing planned pre-evaluation ice sessions and avoiding evaluations the first week of school which can be stressful for players and families and allows all U11 (Atom) players to be actively playing for 100% of the season.

U11 (Atom) Player Pathway Policy (must be followed for the 2020-21 season):

1. No evaluations from March through August. Preparation phase can begin the Tuesday following Labour Day.
 - a. Rationale: Give female hockey associations and parents back the summer – the season does not need to start this early only to be finished at the end of January or early in February (start later and end later). The start of school year can be very stressful for young players, and they do not need to add hockey tryouts starting at the same time as the school year. Give female hockey associations a chance to get organized and begin planning.
2. No evaluations the first week of school where school starts the week after Labour Day.
3. Must offer a minimum of 4 practices / skill sessions prior to formal evaluations beginning.

- a. Rationale: A player's first experience in the new hockey season should not be a formal tryout – this gives all players the opportunity to get back on the ice in a more 'player-friendly' scenario. Help level the playing field; not all players have a chance to go to hockey schools or prep camps prior to the start of the season. Provide female hockey associations the opportunity to run their own prep camp instead of members spending money outside the association.
4. Must have a minimum of 3 formal evaluation sessions – Recommended - 1 skills session, 1 small area games session, 1 game.
 - a. Rationale: Players need a fair chance to be evaluated – a standardized process will show transparency, fairness and consistency. Provide coaches with the foundation for a development plan based on a solid and quantifiable evaluation.
5. Must have a period of development time following team selection and prior to the start of the regular season.
 - a. Rationale: It is very important to provide coaches with the opportunity to develop and improve their players skills prior to getting into organized games. The progression should be skills before tactics and tactics before systems. This will eliminate or reduce pressure and or focus on winning.
6. Must be tournament style playoffs versus elimination rounds
 - a. Rationale: Give all teams the chance to play to same end point in the season. All players deserve the same chance to play to the end of the year. More teams and more players playing longer into the season. Allows more rest and recovery within the season and the regular season schedule can be spread out. Greater opportunity for more players to participate in different activities.
7. Fair/equal ice time (goalies rotate for equal games/playing time through, season and playoffs)
 - a. Rationale: Fair and equal ice time is designed to ensure that all players get the same opportunity to contribute to the outcome of games, regardless of skill or ability. A coach's responsibility is to develop all players to contribute. Shortening of the bench in an attempt to win games is not permitted. All players should receive fair and as close to equal as possible ice time, including equal opportunities on special teams.
8. Limit position specific specialization (except goalies) rotate all players through all positions.
 - a. Rationale: Players may determine that they wish to be a full-time goaltender, but it is important for all Players to learn the fundamentals of every position for the overall development of the Player.

U11 (Atom) Pathway Recommendations (Members should encourage and support):

1. Season should allow for two (2) seasonal breaks (not including Christmas / long weekends)
2. Recommended maximum of 45 games per year (including tournaments and playoffs).
3. Small Area Games in practice / Station based practices
4. Ideal Seasonal Structure:
 - a. Preparation/Evaluation Phase: This refers to the period of time prior to the season starting. Please see numbers 1 through 4 in Policy. (Up to 4 weeks)

- b. Development Phase: This refers to the period of time following tryouts prior to the regular season starting. (Up to 4 weeks, 8-12 practices, 2 exhibitions games)
- c. Regular season: This refers to the period of time from the first regular-season game to the start of playoffs (Up to 24 weeks, 22-44 practices, 16 to 20 games)
- d. Playoffs: This refers to the period of time from the end of the playoffs to the start of the next Preparation/Tryout Phase. Commencing after March 15. Up to 4 weeks. Tournament style playoffs.
- e. Offseason Phase: This refers to the period of time from the end of the playoffs to the start of the next Preparation/Tryout Phase.

With the implementation of the U11 (Atom) Player Pathway, Hockey Canada has implemented amendments to the Player Pathways at U9 (Novice) and U7 (Initiation) that will create consistency in all programming across the country and a seamless transition for players from U7 (Initiation) through to U11 (Atom) based on Long Term Player Development.

The key amendments to the U7 (Initiation) and U9 (Novice) Player Pathways are:

U7 (Initiation) Player Pathway

1. No tiering or evaluations from March through August. Preparation phase can begin the Tuesday following Labour Day.
 - a. Rationale: Give female hockey associations and parents back the summer – the season does not need to start this early only to be finished at the end of January or early in February (start later and end later). The start of school year can be very stressful for young players, and they do not need to add hockey tryouts starting at the same time as the school year. Give female hockey associations a chance to get organized and begin planning.
2. No tiering or evaluations the first week of school where school starts the week after Labour Day.
3. Must offer a minimum of 4 practices / skill sessions prior to formal tiering or evaluations beginning.
 - a. Rationale: A player's first experience in the new hockey season should not be a formal tryout – this gives all players the opportunity to get back on the ice in a more 'player-friendly' scenario. Help level the playing field; not all players have a chance to go to hockey schools or prep camps prior to the start of the season. Provide female hockey associations the opportunity to run their own prep camp instead of members spending money outside the association.
4. Must have a minimum of 3 formal tiering/evaluation sessions – Recommended - 1 skills session, 1 small area games session, 1 game.
 - a. Rationale: Players need a fair chance to be evaluated – a standardized process will show transparency, fairness and consistency. Provide coaches with the foundation for a development play based on a solid and quantifiable evaluation.
5. Must have a period of development time following team selection and prior to the start of the regular season.

- a. Rationale: It is very important to provide coaches with the opportunity to develop and improve their players skills prior to getting into organized games. The progression should be skills before tactics and tactics before systems. This will eliminate or reduce pressure and or focus on winning.
- 6. All U7 (Initiation) will be played at cross-ice or a maximum size of 100x60.
 - a. Rationale: Allowing players to play cross-ice hockey in U7 (Initiation) provides the base for a clear progression in the programming allowing for players to then transition to half-ice at U9 (Novice).
- 7. U7 (Initiation) game play will be 4 on 4.
- 8. Fair / Equal Ice Time in U7 (Initiation) game play.
 - a. Rationale: Fair and equal ice time is designed to ensure that all players get the same opportunity to contribute to the outcome of games, regardless of skill or ability. A coach's responsibility is to develop all players to contribute. All players should receive fair and as close to equal as possible ice time.

U9 (Novice) Player Pathway

1. No tiering or evaluations from March through August. Preparation phase can begin the Tuesday following Labour Day.
 - a. Rationale: Give female hockey associations and parents back the summer – the season does not need to start this early only to be finished at the end of January or early in February (start later and end later). The start of school year can be very stressful for young players, and they do not need to add hockey tryouts starting at the same time as the school year. Give female hockey associations a chance to get organized and begin planning.
2. No tiering or evaluations the first week of school where school starts the week after Labour Day.
3. Must offer a minimum of 4 practices / skill sessions prior to formal tiering or evaluations beginning.
 - a. Rationale: A player's first experience in the new hockey season should not be a formal tryout – this gives all players the opportunity to get back on the ice in a more 'player-friendly' scenario. Help level the playing field; not all players have a chance to go to hockey schools or prep camps prior to the start of the season. Provide female hockey associations the opportunity to run their own prep camp instead of members spending money outside the association.
4. Must have a minimum of 3 formal evaluation/tiering sessions – Recommended - 1 skills session, 1 small area games session, 1 game.
 - a. Rationale: Players need a fair chance to be evaluated – a standardized process will show transparency, fairness and consistency. Provide coaches with the foundation for a development plan based on a solid and quantifiable evaluation.
5. Must have a period of development time following team selection and prior to the start of the regular season.

- a. Rationale: It is very important to provide coaches with the opportunity to develop and improve their players skills prior to getting into organized games. The progression should be skills before tactics and tactics before systems. This will eliminate or reduce pressure and or focus on winning.
- 6. Fair/Equal Ice Time in U9 (Novice) game play.
 - a. Rationale: Fair and equal ice time is designed to ensure that all players get the same opportunity to contribute to the outcome of games, regardless of skill or ability. A coach's responsibility is to develop all players to contribute. Shortening of the bench in an attempt to win games is not permitted. All players should receive fair and as close to equal as possible ice time, including equal opportunities on special teams.
- 7. There will be no full-time goalies in U9 (Novice).
 - a. Rationale: Early specialization of a position hinders the overall development of a Player.
 Allowing for all players to rotate through all positions prepares the player for playing multiple positions or on special team plays by learning the fundamentals at an early age.
- 8. U8/U9 (Mixed Age Programming Novice) and U9 (Novice) will be played at half-ice or a maximum size of 100x100 until Jan 15.
 - a. Rationale: Allowing players to play cross-ice hockey in U7 (Initiation) provides the base for a clear progression in the programming allowing for players to then transition to full- ice January 15 in U8/U9 (Mixed Age Programming Novice) and U9 (Novice) and then for a full season in U11 (Atom)
- 9. U8/U9 (Mixed Programming Novice) and U9 (Novice) game play will be 4 on 4 until Jan 15.

The Policy and Recommendations for the U7 (Initiation), U9 (Novice) and U11 (Atom) Pathways have been identified with the parent and player in mind; allowing families to have their summer break back while still providing on ice opportunities ahead of evaluations, giving players key seasonal breaks to allow for holidays and the chance to play other sports throughout the year and establishing consistent age appropriate programming that is in line with the Long-Term Player Development.

Furthermore, moving from Spring to Fall evaluations at these age groups, allows the opportunity for Female hockey associations to provide Member sanctioned non-traditional hockey programs, 3 on 3, 4 on 4, or skills clinics beginning any time after the conclusion of the OWHA Provincial Championships and completing no later than June 30.

The OWHA and female hockey associations will work together to ensure that the policy outlined throughout this new programming are administered to provide players with the best possible experience within hockey. As such, please find attached the Player Pathway Policy and Rationale for U7 (Initiation), U9 (Novice) and U11 (Atom) divisions. Please review these sections of the Player Pathway for clarity and consistency in the documents and return any feedback or questions to the OWHA office.