

July 6, 2020

Elite Male Host Minor Hockey Associations / Clubs
Via Email

RE: 2020-21 AEHL Return to Hockey / Scheduling

On June 30, 2020, Hockey Alberta released its Return to Hockey Plan. I encourage all of you to carefully read it to understand the plan for returning to playing hockey in Alberta and the role that you and your organizations play in that process. The Hockey Alberta Return to Hockey Plan can be found [here](#).

From a review of the Hockey Alberta Return to Hockey Plan and information provided from the Hockey Alberta Townhall with Hockey Canada representatives, there are several recurring themes;

- Our game will return to play, timing is the unknown
- There must be a plan built and constantly revisited as new information comes available
- Communication is the key asset in this process
- This is a race, but it is the race to be right not the race to be first
- Athlete and volunteer safety are paramount

What is clear from the Hockey Alberta Return to Hockey Plan, as outlined in the “Return to Hockey Programming - Section III (page 16), is that League play will only occur once the Province has determined that we can move to Phase 3 of the pandemic response plan. Since the Hockey Alberta Return to Hockey Plan was released, the AEHL leadership has met several times to develop the League’s plan, which is attached, related to the 2020-2021 AEHL schedule in a Phase 3 of the pandemic response.

Our Governors responsible for each category of play have begun the scheduling process to gather ice availability and will begin to build out the full schedule as outlined later this week.

The planned 2020-21 seasonal structure was prepared with the following in mind:

- 2020-21 is an unusual year because of the impact of COVID-19.
- We are planning on a full schedule, assuming we are in Phase 3 of the pandemic recovery plan at the time we are planning to start. Teams will need to be ready to start season play at that time and will begin their preparation process as outlined in the HA Plan.
- Should we see a delay in the start of the season, we will be revisiting this plan. Our goal will be to maintain as much of the seasonal structure as we have outlined, keeping as many of the games as possible in the window remaining. That will take some cooperation with the League, the facilities that we use and you. We will revisit timing in two (2) week intervals.
- To the greatest extent possible, we will maximize the opportunity for the athletes and volunteers to get the most from the game of hockey.
- As we said on our launch conference call – “Player First” – putting the interest of the players at the forefront.

- We have not made radical changes to the format. There have been limited changes to the regular season formats that were used in the prior years in each category of play. We will be limiting travel between the two divisions (North and South) in the first half of the year to make sure that Phase 3 recovery plans progress as expected and allow for some flexibility in rescheduling games if required.
- After consultation with some members, we have made changes to the playoff structures for both the U15 and U16 categories which will see both use a “play in” format for the lower seeded teams and both categories will use series play that will culminate in a five (5) team Provincial Championship tournament.
- This proposed plan sees more players playing hockey longer into the spring and provides us some opportunity for flexibility at the front end of the schedule should there be a delay in League play as a result of COVID-19.
- We believe that this proposed plan provides a reasonable cost approach for the 2020-21 hockey season.

These are changes that we are proposing for 2020-21 given the current situation. Rest assured it is my expectation that as we progress through this season, we will continue to look at the structure of play in the League to make further recommendations that enhance the hockey experience for all involved in the AEHL for the following season.

As members, we are now reaching out to you share our proposed season structure document, which is attached, to get your feedback on what, if anything, in this proposed structure is not workable for the coming year.

I would ask that you review the attached and please return any comments that you have to Bryden Burrell, Coordinator, Hockey Programs (bburrell@hockeyalberta.ca) by Thursday, July 9th by 4:00pm.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Regards,



Neil Robertson
Chair, Elite Male Committee