



# RETURN to HOCKEY

COVID-19 RESPONSE

# Officiating Guidelines

VERSION 2

---

Revised July 29, 2021



# Table of Contents

Message from Hockey Canada	3
RTH Safety Guidelines & Insurance Clarification	4
Introduction	5
Key Considerations	5
Minimum Requirements for the 2020-21 Season	6
Guidelines for On-Ice Officials	11
Procedures for On-Ice Officials	12
Frequently Asked Questions	15
Members	19
Conclusion	19

# Message from Hockey Canada

Since early March 2020, earlier in many countries, the world as we knew it has changed dramatically. Many facets of our day-to-day routine have been altered by COVID-19. Hockey has not been immune; the pandemic has impacted each and every province and territory in Canada.

Hockey Canada has compiled this Return to Hockey document so officials have access to the information they require to safely get back on the ice, and are comfortable with their role as the third team on the ice.

This document addresses the needs of on-ice officials, both from a standpoint of certification for the 2021-22 season, and guidelines and procedures for working games at all levels. This includes everything from the basics of face-offs and line changes to greeting coaches before a game.

Hockey Canada would like to thank our task team for its commitment to these recommendations. We have worked with our Members and Hockey Canada staff to ensure our officials are ready when our game is ready.

**Michael Brind'Amour**

Chair, Board of Directors

**Tom Renney**

Chief Executive Officer

**Scott Smith**

President & COO

# Return to Hockey Safety Guidelines & Insurance Clarification

Hockey Canada has created Return to Hockey [Safety Guidelines](#) to ensure a safe return to the ice this season. While this comprehensive document applies on a national basis, it is important to recognize that most health and safety protocols are managed at the provincial/territorial level.

It should be used in concert with:

- Public health authority guidelines
- [Hockey Canada Member](#) guidelines
- Facility guidelines

**NOTE:** Within this document, *public health authority* refers to federal, provincial/territorial and local health authorities across Canada.

## Hockey Canada Insurance Clarification

Under Hockey Canada's current General Liability policy, there is a specific definition for the term 'bodily injury' and that definition includes **sickness and disease**. Many insurance companies are implementing Communicable Disease/COVID-19 exclusions on policies, but Hockey Canada has successfully negotiated to leave that exclusion off until September 1, 2023 at the earliest.

As with all claim scenarios, the insurance company would investigate all claims presented against any Member of Hockey Canada that falls within the 'bodily injury' definition, and would confirm coverage based on the framing of the allegations.

Liability claims against Hockey Canada always need to be proven by the third party, so continuing to update and enforce risk-management guidelines as new risks emerge, such as COVID-19, are imperative.

Remember that insurance is only one part of the risk-management process. It is important that we all pay special attention to preventing COVID-19 in the hockey environment.

# Introduction

The Officiating Task Team was formed to conduct a detailed review of the Hockey Canada Officiating Program and the impact on how and when on-ice officials would return to the game as a result of COVID-19.

From that review, the Officiating Task Team has made a number of recommendations with regards to the 2021-22 season to meet the challenges of a return to hockey in the COVID-19 environment, in whatever format that may be.

These recommendations include:

- Minimum requirements for certification or re-certification for the 2021-22 season.
- Playing rule changes approved at the 2019 Winter Congress.
- Reviewing playing rules related to COVID-19.

# Key Considerations

As hockey returns in Canada, it will likely look very different in various regions including the role of the on-ice official. As a result, the Officiating Task Team has identified several key considerations for the 2021-22 season:

- Hockey may not start at the same time across the country.
- The need to develop a different delivery format for officiating clinics.
- Certification or re-registration for officials.
- Adoption of new playing rules.
- COVID-19 safety protocol implications for on-ice officials.
- Playing rules related to COVID-19 to address physical distancing.
- The needs for flexible and adaptable programming to meet the needs of the Members, while also educating and supporting on-ice officials.

# Minimum Requirements for the 2021-22 Season

The following are the minimum requirements for the 2021-22 Hockey Canada Officiating Program, as established by the Return to Hockey Officiating Task Team. Members may deliver additional training while adhering to approved public health authority guidelines.

## New Officials

For the 2021-22 season, all new officials must complete a **certification process**, which would include the minimum requirements outlined below.

Clinic delivery will be at the discretion of the Member, based on public health authority guidelines.

Topic	DELIVERY FORMAT		RESOURCES	
	Face-to-Face OR Virtual Clinic	Group/Individual Task	PPT	PDF
Hockey Canada University I/II Modules		✓		
Hockey Canada Officiating Procedures	✓			✓
Hockey Canada Officiating Systems	✓			✓
• Two-Official System	✓		✓	
• Three-Official System	✓		✓	
• Four-Official System (where applicable)	✓		✓	
Hockey Canada Officiating Duties for Referees and Linespersons	✓			✓
Hockey Canada Officiating Signals	✓		✓	
Hockey Canada Playing Rules Overview	✓		✓	
Introduction to the Rule Book	✓			
Hockey Canada 2020-22 Playing Rules Revisions	✓		✓	
Penalty Classifications	✓		✓	
Managing Time Penalties	✓		✓	
Key Rule Definitions & Examples (Check from Behind/Head Contact/Body-Checking)	✓		✓	
COVID-19 Module	✓		✓	
Quiz/Examination		✓		
Register within Local Association		✓		

## Member-Specific/Optional

Member Information

Electronic Game Sheets

Game Reports/Assigning

## Returning Level I/II Officials

For the 2021-22 season, all returning Level I and II officials must complete a **re-certification process**, which would include the minimum requirements outlined below.

Clinic delivery will be at the discretion of the Member, based on public health authority guidelines.

Topic	DELIVERY FORMAT		RESOURCES	
	Face-to-Face OR Virtual Clinic	Group/Individual Task	PPT	PDF
Hockey Canada Officiating Procedures	✓			✓
Hockey Canada Officiating Systems	✓			✓
• Two-Official System	✓		✓	
• Three-Official System	✓		✓	
• Four-Official System (where applicable)	✓		✓	
Hockey Canada Officiating Duties for Referees and Linespersons	✓			✓
Hockey Canada Officiating Signals	✓		✓	
Hockey Canada 2020-22 Playing Rules Revisions	✓		✓	
Penalty Classifications	✓		✓	
Managing Time Penalties	✓		✓	
Key Rule Definitions & Examples (Check from Behind/Head Contact/Body-Checking)	✓		✓	
COVID-19 Module	✓		✓	
Quiz/Examination		✓		
Register within Local Association		✓		

### Member-Specific/Optional

Member Information

Electronic Game Sheets

Game Reports/Assigning

## Returning Level III, Member High Performance and National High Performance Officials

For the 2021-22 season, there will be **no formal certification** process for returning Level III, Member High Performance and National High Performance Officials, but as a minimum requirement they will be expected to review the information below prior to registering.

Members may deliver additional training at their discretion, based on public health authority guidelines.

Topic	DELIVERY FORMAT		RESOURCES	
	Face-to-Face OR Virtual Clinic	Group/Individual Task	PPT	PDF
Hockey Canada Officiating Procedures		✓		✓
Hockey Canada Officiating Systems		✓		✓
• Two-Official System		✓	✓	
• Three-Official System		✓	✓	
• Four-Official System (where applicable)		✓	✓	
Hockey Canada Officiating Duties for Referees and Linespersons		✓		✓
Hockey Canada 2020-22 Playing Rules Revisions		✓	✓	
COVID-19 eLearning Safety Module		✓		
Quiz/Examination		✓		
Register within Local Association		✓		

### Member-Specific/Optional

Member Information

Electronic Game Sheets

Game Reports/Assigning

**NOTE:** The Officiating Task Team recommends that all officiating instructors, officiating coaches/supervisors and Level III, Member High Performance and National High Performance Officials complete the COVID-19 eLearning module (Planning a Safe Return to Hockey) through Hockey University.

## Cross-Ice Officials - Optional

For the 2021-22 season, there will be **no requirement of a formal certification process** for cross-ice officials, but as a minimum requirement they will be expected to review the information below prior to registering.

Clinic delivery will be at the discretion of the Member, based on public health authority guidelines.

Topic	DELIVERY FORMAT		RESOURCES	
	Face-to-Face OR Virtual Clinic	Group/Individual Task	PPT	PDF
Hockey Canada Cross-Ice Officiating Module	✓		✓	✓
COVID-19 Module	✓		✓	
Register within Local Association		✓		

### Member-Specific/Optional

Member Information

Electronic Game Sheets

Game Reports/Assigning

**NOTE:** If an official will be assigned games in age categories which play full ice, they would be required to complete the applicable certification process.

# Guidelines for On-Ice Officials

The following are Hockey Canada recommended guidelines for officials in minor, female, junior and senior hockey. Officials should be aware that their Member or local association/league(s) may have established their own officiating guidelines as part of their Return to Hockey plan, which may be more or less restrictive than those provided nationally depending upon the impact of COVID-19 in their region.

- On-Ice officials should come fully dressed in uniform, if possible.
- Personal towels only (officials should shower at home).
- Have personal hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes.
- If possible, hands should be washed prior to start of each period (officials can carry a small bottle of sanitizer with them on the ice or have hand sanitizer in the penalty box for use).
- Wear a cloth mask at all times within the facility. Masks can be removed while officials are on the ice. Continue to monitor public health authority and facility guidelines specific to the wearing of masks.
- Physical distancing is required in the officials' dressing room. Work with facility staff to see if more rooms are available, as well as marked spaces/stalls within the dressing room. If the officials' dressing room is small, a rotation system should be considered.
- Only game officials and one officiating coach/supervisor should be in the officials dressing room and physical-distancing must be practiced – no visitors.
- It is prohibited for officials to drink from water bottles belonging to skaters or goaltenders. If officials require water during a game, they should have their own water bottle at the penalty bench.
- Officials should verbally greet coaches as they generally do, but with physical distancing. No handshakes.
- When reporting penalties, limit speaking through the hole in the glass – work from a distance.
- Some equipment should be washed (jerseys, pants, etc.) after each day of assignments, following manufacturer guidelines. It is important that officials ensure equipment is kept clean.
- Practice physical distancing as much as possible when arriving to the facility, while off the ice and when leaving the facility.
- When sneezing or coughing, do so into a tissue or the bend of your elbow. Wash or sanitize hands immediately and discard of tissue into appropriate waste bins.
- Avoid sharing equipment.
- If an official develops COVID-19 symptoms, or is feeling ill, they are directed to stay home.

# Procedures for On-Ice Officials

The following are recommended procedures and best practices for on-ice officials to consider. Health and safety are the primary concern of participants and on-ice officials in all cases.

## FACE-OFFS

Current procedures have minimal handing off of pucks for face-offs; the official who picks up the puck drops the same puck. The only scenario where a hand-off occurs is following a goal where the official hands to the referee in a three-official or four-official system.

Hockey Canada procedures have the official standing in an upright position and not in a crouch, which minimizes face-to-face exposure. However, there is potential risk as officials are now above the height of the players' heads in most minor hockey games and often use the procedure of blowing the whistle (which may or may not expel droplets) prior to the face-off. It is recommended for the fast face-off procedure that the official back off the face-off dot by six feet, blow their whistle and return to the face-off dot to drop the puck.

Officials should also discourage players and goaltenders from retrieving the puck. Allow the officials to pick up the puck in all cases.

## LINE CHANGES

Officials shall continue to follow current line-change procedures. It is suggested that officials avoid high-traffic areas where possible, but have a greater sense of awareness of player interaction that may cause potential scums or altercations.

In regions where officials are required to wear a cloth mask on the ice-surface it is recommended that the official conducting the line change procedure blow the whistle to begin the face-off process and not the official dropping the puck.

## PENALIZED PLAYERS

When escorting players to the penalty bench, the official should physically distance themselves from the player(s) at all times. If this is not possible, officials may require being closer to players to separate them, but should refrain from touching players where possible.

## SCRUMS AND ALTERCATIONS

Often officials will find themselves in a situation of separating players in scrums and/or altercations. The officials have a job to do, and one of their responsibilities is to protect the players and maintain a safe environment for all participants during such situations. Awareness and hustle by the officials are more important than ever, as doing so will help prevent scrums/altercations and/or de-escalate heated moments.

When an altercation occurs, officials should exercise proper techniques to quickly and efficiently separate the players. Once separated, officials should minimize contact with the players and position themselves to maintain physical distancing while escorting the player(s) to the penalty bench, if necessary.

Following proper procedures in separating players quickly and re-establishing physical distancing between the official and players provides minimal risk. If desired, the stoppage of play can be used to disinfect with hand sanitizer.

Officials should also be proactive in advising player(s) and teams that scrums/altercations will not be tolerated, and players may be penalized accordingly. Gatherings amongst players should be discouraged to protect players and officials and provide a safe and health playing environment.

## POSITIONING NEAR PLAYERS' BENCHES

Positioning during play will often have an official alongside the players' benches. Officials are encouraged to position themselves a minimum of six feet away from the bench where possible; however, there may be situations where this is unavoidable. Officials should stay off the benches as much as possible. It is recommended that officials refrain from jumping on the boards to avoid the play. The primary focus is always the safety of the officials when close to the play.

## PRE-GAME FAIR PLAY PROCEDURE

Hockey Canada procedure is for officials to approach each bench and meet the coaches, while at the same time practicing physical distancing. Officials should not shake hands with coaches. Officials are encouraged to skate in front of both benches and make eye contact with the coaches. This is an excellent opportunity to establish expectations regarding communication with the coaches during the game.

## COMMUNICATION WITH BENCHES

Officials are encouraged to limit visits to the benches where possible. However, if an official needs to visit a bench to communicate with a coach, they should maintain physical distancing and not be in contact with the bench area.

Coaches and team officials should wear their masks in the proper position at all times when communicating with on-ice officials, regardless whether physical distancing is maintained.

## COMMUNICATION WITH TIMEKEEPERS AND SCOREKEEPERS

When reporting penalties at the penalty bench, officials should avoid speaking through the hole in the glass. They are encouraged to report penalties while maintaining physical distancing. If an official is required to verbally communicate with an off-ice official, the off-ice official is encouraged to open the penalty bench door, where required, and the official can then report infractions from a distance. This practice should only be used when necessary.

It is recommended where possible that officials not touch game sheets prior to or after a game. If required, the off-ice officials can write the names of the game officials on the game sheets. Associations should explore options for use of electronic game sheets.

## REFEREE'S CREASE

Regarding captains and players, this is an excellent opportunity to re-establish the importance of the referee's crease in front of the penalty bench. For any longer conversations, officials should position themselves in the crease and ask players to maintain physical distancing outside the crease. For quicker conversations, officials should simply remind players to maintain physical distancing when necessary.

## MODIFIED SEASONAL STRUCTURES

Officials should be aware that local associations and Members may implement certain guidelines and structures based on their Return to Hockey plan (e.g. 3-on-3, 4-on-4, no-face offs, players changing on the fly, etc.). Officials are encouraged to work with their association (e.g. referee-in-chief) to be aware of any special rules that may be implemented during the COVID-19 environment.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## 1. Do officials need to wear a cloth mask while on the ice?

The wearing of a cloth mask during a game is the choice of the official. Like players, the mask may hamper breathing during exercise and may also become sweaty. However, if the official feels more comfortable wearing a cloth mask, they should choose to do so. A cloth mask should be worn by all officials anywhere in the facility prior to and just after leaving the ice.

Wearing a cloth mask alone will not prevent the spread of COVID-19. Officials must consistently and strictly adhere to good hygiene and public health authority guidelines, including frequent hand washing and physical distancing. Continue to monitor public health authority guidelines specific to the wearing of cloth masks.

## 2. Should officials be required to wear gloves while on the ice?

Hockey Canada does not recommend that officials wear gloves. The concern is if the official's hands come in contact with the virus while wearing the gloves, the virus will remain on the gloves until changed. If the official then touches their face, the virus would be transferred and there is a greater risk of contracting the virus. Therefore, unless the official plans on changing gloves after every face-off, gloves would not be an effective way to prevent transmission.

More important for officials is to:

- Bring hand sanitizer to the game and utilize it during stoppages of play when possible and at the end of each period.
- Avoid touching their face, nose, mouth and eyes with unclean hands.
- Immediately address any injuries, such as an exposed cut, before returning to the game.

## 3. Should officials consider using electronic whistles?

Electronic whistles are an acceptable option for on-ice officials. Using a standard finger-grip whistle could propel moisture droplets into the air and potentially expose other officials, players and coaches to the virus. Electronic whistles are a personal choice that each official can make. Regardless of the type whistle used, however, it is important that the official cleans/disinfects the whistle between periods and after each game.

Officials should make every effort to avoid blowing their whistle when in close proximity to other players or officials. When necessary, officials should blow their whistle in a different direction.

## 4. How do officials handle pre-game handshakes with coaches?

The Hockey Canada procedure is for officials to approach each bench and meet the coaches. Officials should not shake hands with coaches, and should maintain proper physical distancing six feet from the bench. Official(s) are encouraged to make eye contact with the coaches.

This is an excellent opportunity to establish expectations regarding communication with the coaches, or captains, during the game. This should also be the standard practice/position if it is necessary to communicate with a coach during the game.

## 5. What is Hockey Canada's recommendation regarding pre-game or post-game handshakes for players and team officials?

Hockey Canada has eliminated the practice of pre- and post-game handshakes between players and team officials as a result of COVID-19. This will remain in effect until otherwise directed. Officials should not shake hands, or bump fists, with players or coaches. If coaches approach the officials on the ice after the game with the intent of shaking hands, a quick wave and thank you as the official maintains physical distancing would be appropriate.

## 6. Many officials' dressing rooms can be small. How are officials going to be able to practice physical distancing when there may be limited space for officials?

Officials must follow public health authority guidelines, and those of the facility, and respect physical distancing where required. There are times when physical distancing may not be possible and the recommendation in those situations is to wear a cloth mask.

If physical distancing is required in a designated officials' dressing room, officials should work with facility staff to see if more rooms may be available. If the officials' dressing room is small, a rotation system could be considered. This may also require a little extra teamwork as the next game crew can arrive and get dressed a little earlier so the crew coming off the ice has some space, or the crew coming off the ice can wait a few minutes until the next crew is dressed and can step out. The bottom line is good teamwork may be necessary to respect everyone's space.

In some cases, there may be situations where access to the officials' dressing room is not permitted. It may require officials arrive at the rink fully dressed except skates, helmet and sweater – just like the players. It is important to work with the local association to understand facility restrictions and protocols so officials can be prepared upon arrival at the facility.

## 7. What protocol should officials follow if a player is spitting/blowing their nose without a tissue on the ice or in the bench area?

Officials should encourage and promote proper hygiene habits with players, as outlined in the [Hockey Canada Safety Guidelines](#). Officials may provide reminders and, if necessary, communicate warnings to players and coaches regarding as covered in the Officiating Points of Focus under subsection – Spitting.

## 8. How should officials handle the management of player equipment on the ice? (e.g. broken/dropped sticks, neck guards, mouthguards, gloves, etc.)

Officials are directed not to pick up any equipment that may be on the ice. At the first stoppage of play, officials shall direct the player to retrieve their own equipment. When players are being escorted to the penalty bench and equipment is left on the ice, officials should follow the Hockey Canada Officiating Procedures and direct one player from the same team to collect any equipment.

## 9. Should officials disinfect their gear after each game?

It is recommended by Hockey Canada that officials wash their equipment (jersey, pants, etc.) after each day of assignments, following manufacturer guidelines. It is also good practice to disinfect the helmet/visor and whistle. It is important that officials ensure equipment is kept clean.

## 10. Do officials have access to water bottles during a game?

It is suggested that officials should have their own pre-filled water bottle at the penalty bench. Water bottles should be washed after each game. Officials are prohibited from drinking water from bottles belonging to goaltenders or players.

## 11. Should pucks be disinfected prior to use?

It is not a requirement of Hockey Canada that pucks are disinfected prior to use. However, where possible, and in cooperation with teams and associations, it is suggested that all game pucks could be disinfected with an alcohol-based wipe prior to being used. Also, any pucks that go out of play should be disinfected prior to being used again for game play.

## 12. Will in-person clinics be permitted for officials?

Members will determine how clinics will be delivered in their jurisdiction and must adhere to public health authority guidelines. Members may be permitted to conduct face-to-face clinics, following guidelines, if desired. If there are restrictions, Members may have to host virtual clinics.

## 13. What should officials do if they feel ill or sick?

If an official feels ill or sick, they are directed to stay home and follow the direction of their physician and public health authority. Officials should refer to the protocols outlined in the [Hockey Canada Safety Guidelines](#) and their Member's Return to Hockey plan.

## 14. If a player contracts COVID-19, that player's team must self-isolate as per public health authority guidelines. Would the self-isolation also apply to any on-ice officials that may have come in contact?

Officials should refer to their public health authority guidelines and the information in Section 7 of the [Hockey Canada Safety Guidelines](#).

## 15. If an official falls ill from an infection that can be shown to have come from contact during a game, and if any lost salary is not covered by the official's regular employer, what compensation for this lost salary, if any, could be available through Hockey Canada's insurance program?

If an official should contract COVID-19 or become ill because of contact in a game and this results in lost salary from their employer, there is not a policy under the Hockey Canada program that would provide this type of coverage.

## 16. Is there any special training that officials should take related to COVID-19?

Hockey Canada has established a set of minimum requirements for officials training for the 2020-21 season. This includes information related to COVID-19 and will be provided to all officials for review.

In addition, Hockey Canada, through the guidance of the Health and Safety Task Team and developed by Respect in Sport, has created an eLearning module: **Planning a Safe Return to Hockey**.

The module, which will be hosted on Hockey University and available at no cost to membership, offers a concise overview of Hockey Canada's Return to Hockey Safety Guidelines. The program looks at key information to help reduce the risk of COVID-19 in the hockey environment. Throughout the module, membership will be pointed towards detailed information on specific prevention topics. All Members are encouraged to become familiar with public health authority guidelines and the [Hockey Canada Safety Guidelines](#).

The Officiating Task Team recommends that all officiating instructors, officiating coaches/supervisors and all Level III/IV/V/VI officials complete the COVID-19 eLearning module.

## 17. How should officiating coaches or supervisors communicate with game officials in cases where restrictions are in place for physical distancing?

If physical distancing, masking, and other public health measures can be respected, officiating coaches/supervisors should be admitted to facilities and to the officials' dressing room. If officiating coaches/supervisors are prohibited from visiting the officials' dressing room, they should consider other means to communicate with officials following a game, which may include by phone, virtual meetings or by email.

Associations are permitted to utilize on-ice coach/mentor officials, but also must respect and follow public health authority and facility guidelines.

# Members

These uncertain times have necessitated specific measures to allow Canadians to return to the sport we love. Hockey Canada has worked with its Members and subject-matter experts to prepare participants in the best manner possible in the development of this document.

Officials should be aware that Members or local association/league(s) may have established their own Return to Hockey guidelines regarding on-ice officials. Officials are encouraged to [reach out to their Member](#).

# Conclusion

We have all faced the unique and difficult challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Thankfully, as provinces and territories gradually and safely re-open, a return to hockey, albeit likely in different forms across the country, seems possible.

Several recommendations, considerations and resources have been presented to support associations and membership in organizing hockey this season. Looking ahead to next season and beyond requires hockey leaders to explore several new ideas and options for today's game.

Although we respect tradition, it is time to be creative and innovative to enhance the game, including the on-ice officiating experience, not just in the short-term, but for years to come.

This is the time for all of us to **make hockey more**.

Special thanks to the Officiating Task Team for their contributions and commitment.

**Randy Pulsifer** | Hockey Canada  
**Todd Robinson** | Referee-in-chief, Hockey Canada  
**Adam Aldred** | Hockey Nova Scotia  
**Stéphane Auger** | Hockey Quebec  
**John Butcher** | Hockey Eastern Ontario  
**Tom Kowal** | Western Hockey League  
**Scott Oakman** | Ontario Hockey Federation (GTHL)  
**Lacey Senuk** | Hockey Alberta  
**Laurie Taylor-Bolton** | Ontario Hockey Federation (OWHA)  
**Rob Newson** | Hockey Canada

