



RETURN to HOCKEY
COVID-19 RESPONSE



Return to Hockey FAQ



Purpose

Hockey Newfoundland & Labrador (Hockey NL) has worked in partnership with Hockey Canada and its member associations to develop an appropriate Return to Hockey plan for all of its members. Our purpose is to ensure that every phase of our return to hockey is undertaken with an abundance of caution while respecting the safety of our Players, Coaches, Officials, Administrators and Volunteers. Hockey NL’s plan focuses on making the return to hockey a fun and positive experience while maintaining safety for all our members.

The Return to Hockey plan is designed to encompass September 2020 to April 2021. Our plan is adaptable and can be modified in response to changing conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic within Newfoundland and Labrador. By respecting physical distancing, in addition to encouraging and maintaining good hygiene in our facilities, all members of Hockey NL shall be better prepared to respond effectively.

Disclaimer

The information in this document is not intended or implied to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Hockey NL, and its member associations, leagues and teams make no representation and assume no responsibility in respect of their information concerning COVID-19. The evolving nature of the current pandemic, and any information related to COVID-19, would best be obtained from the Chief Medical Office for Newfoundland & Labrador.

Revisions

REVISION No.	DATE	APPROVED
1.0	2020-07-28	First Draft

Frequently Asked Questions

Question

The Chief Medical Officer is permitting 50 people on ice and 50 spectators in attendance. Why has the Hockey NL Return to Hockey plan restricted on-ice sessions to 25 people and limited the number parents/guardians/spectators inside the facility?

Answer:

There is no practical way to run an effective skills session with such a large number of players on ice. With respect to limiting the number of parents/guardians/spectators inside the facility there will be practical limits to what can be done in each facility. The Sport Guideline from the Government of Newfoundland & Labrador requires a minimum of a 30 minute break between sessions to allow spectators and participants' time to leave and for cleaning/disinfection of equipment and frequently touched surfaces to occur, before the next teams arrive. Increasing the number of parents/guardians/spectators in the facility will increase the amount of time for cleaning/disinfection and reduce the amount of on-ice time available for the players.

Question

Why was the group size of only 25 people on ice chosen for Minor and Female hockey?

Answer:

The group size of only 25 people on ice was chosen to address the requirement to keep the minimum of 2 meters or 6 feet between all participants at all times as established in the Sport Guideline from the Government of Newfoundland & Labrador. Typically the group size of 25 would consist of 20 skaters, 2 goalies and 3 coaches. Some on-ice skills session involve two lines starting in the corners of the ice surface. With 20 skaters and 2 goalies, two lines would consist of 11 players in each line. It was felt that this was the maximum number of players per line that can be accommodated while maintaining the 2 meters or 6 feet separation between players. Also, for other on-ice activities, like stretching and taking instruction from a coach, a larger number of players would encroach on the 2 meters or 6 feet separation between players.

Question

There was a successful AA program in the Tri-Pen zone last season. There is no specific reference to guidelines for this program. Will the AA program follow the season structure as outlined for Minor?

Answer:

Hockey programs below the AAA level will conform to either the AAA Season Structure or the Minor & Female Season Structure. The primary difference between the two season structures is the number of players allowed on ice. The Return to Hockey plan filed by the association or league will identify the number of players involved, and from there the appropriate season structure will apply.

Question

The tradition AAA team/player selection process required players to travel to more than one arena over multiple weekends. This would mean that players from multiple minor hockey associations travel to a centrally located arena and participate with players from other communities. The Return to Hockey plan for Minor requires players stay within the association practicing and playing modified games until Phase 5 with no travel permitted. Please clarify the difference in players travelling for AAA tryouts when Minor players travelling to other associations for games is prohibited.

Answer:

Any team/player selection process requiring players from multiple minor hockey associations to travel to more than one arena over multiple weekends will not necessarily be approved at the start of the 2020/2021 hockey season. While each division of hockey have a 5-phase season structure, it is not the intent of the Return to Hockey plan that all leagues and teams will return to hockey at the same time. Every association and league must develop their own Return to Hockey plan putting into place all of the necessary safety and proper hygiene requirements for its players and coaches.

Question

In the Minor season structure hockey players are required to stay in their own association until Phase 5 and AAA in Phase 3? If this is not correct, please clarify.

Answer:

At Phase 3 both Minor hockey and AAA hockey are restricted from traveling for the purpose of playing modified games. The original release of the Return to Hockey Plan had a spelling error that was not identified prior to release. The original phrase was "Introduction of modified 3-on-3 **inter-team** games...", when it should have been "Introduction of modified 3-on-3 **intra-team** games..." The intent at Phase 3 is for Minor and AAA players to continue to develop within their assigned bubble without travelling or playing against players from other bubbles.

Question

In Phase 5 under Minor with limited inter-association play, will there be definite number of games approved? Having a definitive number of games will place consistency on this across all zones.

Answer:

At this time there is no plan to set parameters around the return to regular 5-on-5 games. Decisions on the number of games, and areas of the province that are ready to return to regular 5-on-5 games, will be made considering the conditions that exist at the time.

Question

Why was the decision made to delay the start of all-star level hockey at the association level without any real explanation as to why all-star hockey cannot proceed? Can all-star teams be selected and remain in their group of 25 until they are permitted to play later in the season.

Answer:

As games between all-star teams are not permitted at the start of the season it was not thought that there would be interest in forming these teams if competitive hockey could not proceed. Further complication arises when trying to set an all-star registration fee without any understanding of if and when games will be permitted, and how many games will be possible. It was felt that starting slow and growing the program would be easier to administer rather than charging for a more expensive all-star program up front and subsequently adjusting the fee to match the actual program offering. Associations are free to organize their teams as they see fit, and if associations want to form all-star teams they are free to do so as long as their player selection process is approved in advance as being safe and conforming to all of the requirements for physical distancing and good hygiene.

Question

Does the AAA- program cause more concern with player travel from all parts of the zone than would association based Minor and Female hockey?

Answer:

Yes, the AAA- program causes more concern with player travel from all parts of the zone. Before the AAA- program can start at any level a plan must be approved in advance as being safe and conforming to all of the requirements for physical distancing and proper hygiene.

Question

Will all divisions of hockey, in particular Minor, Female and AAA start at the same time and progress through the phases together?

Answer:

While each division of hockey have a 5-phase season structure, it is not the intent of the Return to Hockey plan that all associations, leagues and teams will return to hockey at the same time. Every association and league must develop their own Return to Hockey plan that follows the Hockey NL Return to Hockey plan putting into place all of the necessary safety and proper hygiene requirements for our players and coaches.

Question

The Return to Hockey plan requires "groups remaining intact for the season". While this is stressed, any player from any association is eligible for AAA hockey, where tryouts could involve players from multiple association groups combining for AAA tryouts. Does it make sense to stress grouping at the association level if we are prepared to offer the AAA program?

Answer:

This is certainly a valid concern. AAA leagues and teams will have to address this concern when they bring forward their Return to Hockey plan for approval. It may be necessary to carry out a completely different player selection process that does not require players from multiple association groups combining for AAA tryouts. Once selected, players may have to withdraw from their association based hockey.

Question

Are we going to lose a large number of players to private hockey?

Answer:

It is anticipated that player registration for the 2020/2021 season will be different than what it would have been if the COVID 19 pandemic did not occur. Families will choose to not register for Minor or Female hockey for many reasons based on financial and health concerns. Minor and Female hockey have many advantages over private hockey. For the 2020/2021 season, Minor and Female hockey will provide a safe and fun environment for players which will be attractive to most families.

Question

The Return to Hockey plan states that "program delivery could be best achieved by combining multiple small associations into a single delivery model." When smaller associations combine a larger bubble is created that may be difficult to contain. Smaller associations have players that attend different schools in different communities involving more travel and a broader risk of transmission and much more difficulty in doing contact tracing. Why is this being permitted?

Answer:

The Return to Hockey plan is allowing program delivery through combining multiple small associations into a single delivery model to provide viable hockey options to small associations who normally rely on travel tournaments to provide competitive games for their players. The Return to Hockey plan recognizes the challenges small associations face and is suggesting an alternative that may be attractive in some situations. The issues identified in the question such as contact tracing and the extra diligence required to provide a safe environment for children from different communities must be fully addressed in the Return to Hockey plan filed by the associations involved.

Question

There is no reference to high school hockey anywhere in this document. Why would that division of hockey not be addressed in this document?

Answer:

The decision as to whether high school hockey proceeds in the 2020/2021 season rests with the school system. If high school hockey were to proceed, it would have to follow the same season structure requirements established for Minor hockey. High School leagues will have to file a Return to Hockey plan that puts into place all of the necessary safety and proper hygiene requirements for their players and coaches and the Hockey NL officials.

Question

Why is there no mention of AAA Minor Midget and AA Hockey in this Return to Hockey Plan?

Answer:

For the purposes of this Return to Hockey Plan the AAA Minor Midget and AA leagues fall under the AAA division of hockey. If the AAA Minor Midget and AA leagues operate in the 2020/2021 season they will have to file a Return to Hockey plan that puts into place all of the necessary safety and proper hygiene requirements for their players and coaches.

Question

Why does the Return to Hockey plan not address other areas of hockey, for example adult recreational and non-sanctioned private hockey?

Answer:

The Return to Hockey plan did not address adult recreational and non-sanctioned private hockey as these forms of hockey are not governed by Hockey NL.

Question

In Minor and Female hockey if groups must remain together for the season, how are players that play AAA, High School, and Private Hockey going to be accommodated in Minor or Female hockey? Should they be excluded from participating in Minor or Female hockey?

Answer:

Players are not prohibited from participating in hockey (i.e. AAA, High School, and Private Hockey) and non-hockey related activities outside of their association. If a player tests positive for COVID 19, it is expected that all players on the team involved will have to be isolated for a minimum of 14 days, effectively shutting that team down for a 14 day period. To limit the impact on an Association's operations in the event of a positive test, it is recommend that associations limit players to one team only inside the association.

Question

Why is there a higher number allowed on the ice for AAA teams than allowed for Minor or Female hockey?

Answer:

A higher number will be allowed on the ice for AAA teams as they typically carry more players than would a regular minor hockey team. In addition, it is recognized that the older more experienced hockey players will be better able to follow instructions on social distancing and proper hygiene.

Question

Private Hockey appears to be offering a more “normal” hockey experience at their summer hockey schools. Why is the Hockey NL Return to Hockey plan not as aggressive as the Private Hockey operations?

Answer:

Hockey NL is not in a position to comment on what Private Hockey operators are offering. The summer hockey school season is taking place in a low COVID 19 environment. The Hockey NL Return to Hockey plan establishes a framework for sanctioned activities hockey to operate from September 2020 to April 2021. Through this period, public health forecasts that a second wave of COVID 19 will return to the province. The Hockey NL Return to Hockey plan will put into place processes and protocols that should allow sanctioned hockey to continue to operate if this second wave occurs.

Question

The Tri-Com Zone relies on league play (Don Johnson AA/A, Don Johnson A-B-C, Doug Marshall, Interlocking House League) to provide competitive hockey for its players. The Return to Hockey plan only permits association based house league Minor and Female hockey at the start of the 2020/2021 season. Why is pooled and representative hockey not permitted?

Answer:

The Hockey NL Return to Hockey plan has player and coach safety at the forefront. The plan is admittedly conservative, starting slowly and building as the season progresses and more is known regarding the impact of COVID 19 in the community. Pooled hockey or representative hockey necessarily requires a player selection process. Historically these player selection processes in the Tri-Com Zone involve hundreds of players competing for positions on a small number of teams. Having such large groups of players involved in on ice sessions, being evaluated in a highly competitive situation, involves many different concerns. Player selection processes are typically iterative requiring groups of players to be adjusted as other players are released. Finally, due to the strong desire of players to “make the team” it is feared that players who have symptoms will feel pressure to attend when they should not.

Question

To what extent were the Level 2 guidelines considered in the development of the Return to Hockey plan?

Answer:

The Government of Newfoundland & Labrador Level 2 guidelines, along with sport guidelines from other provinces and guidelines developed by Hockey Canada and its branches, were fully considered as they came available.

Question

Is pooled and All-Star hockey just restricted at the start of season, or for entire season?

Answer:

In essence, the Return to Hockey plan is a framework to return to the rink after all hockey was shutdown in March. The plan was developed using the best information available at the time. As we move into the hockey season, and greater clarity is available on how COVID 19 is impacting the community, the plan will evolve. So it is possible that pooled and/or All-Star hockey may be able to return sometime in the 2020/2021 season.

Question

Will HNL consider restricting the introduction of regular 5-on-5 games at Phase 5 until all levels of hockey can play games as of same date?

Answer:

No. The variability in start dates and availability of facilities across all associations and leagues is such that a uniform start date for all games would not be practical. The Return to Hockey plan is laid out to be as flexible as possible in accommodating the individual requirements of all association and leagues within the dates allowed by Hockey Canada.

Question

Will Hockey Canada or Hockey NL be providing training to coaches/trainers/volunteers in the management of COVID-19 protocols including how to effectively identify and manage symptoms during activities?

Answer:

Yes. Hockey Canada and Hockey NL will be providing training to coaches/trainers/volunteers in the management of COVID-19 protocols. The first online courses are expected to be released during the month of August. More information will be provided as the courses are released.

Question

Will Hockey Canada or Hockey NL provide any COVID-19 specific practice plans?

Answer:

Yes COVID-19 specific practice plans are being developed by Hockey Canada. Hockey Canada's Seasonal Structure document issued on July 10, 2020 includes a variety of practice plans in Appendix A. The Hockey Canada document can be found at the link below.

https://cdn.hockeycanada.ca/hockey-canada/Exclusive/return-to-hockey/downloads/HC_RTH_SeasonalStructure_ENG.pdf

Question

Will Hockey NL be providing any further guidance as to the expected checkpoints for moving between phases?

Answer:

Moving between the first 4 phases can be done at the discretion of the individual association or league. It is recommended that a minimum of at least 14 days be allocated to each phase. The decision to move forward should be based on the experience with the current phase and the extent to which everyone is comfortable with the requirement for physical distancing and proper hygiene. Older players may advance quicker than younger players. It would not be inappropriate to consult with your Area Director discussing the reasons why the move may be appropriate.

Question

**How are Female players who also play Minor or AAA handled within the Return to Hockey plan?
Should female players be limited to only one hockey team?**

Answer:

The decision to limit female players to only one team rests with their associations and leagues. If a female player is on a team with someone who tests positive for COVID 19 it is expected that all players on the team involved will have to be isolated for a minimum of 14 days, effectively shutting that team down for a 14 day period. If associations allow individual players to play on multiple teams they run the risk of having to shut down multiple teams if a player is on a team with someone who tests positive for COVID 19.

Question

Similar to above, how are coaches who coach multiple teams handled within the Return to Hockey plan? Should they be limited to one hockey team only?

Answer:

The decision to limit coaches to only one team rests with the associations and leagues. If a coach is on a team with someone who tests positive for COVID 19 it is expected that all team members will have to be isolated for a minimum of 14 days, effectively shutting that team teams down for a 14 day period. If associations allow individual coaches to coach multiple teams they run the risk of having to shut down multiple teams if a coach is on a team with someone who tests positive for COVID 19.

Question

Other sports within the province are already playing games against other associations as are private hockey operations. Is there any consideration to allowing competitive games sooner?

Answer:

The potential risk of COVID-19 spread is highest when individuals are indoors, within 2 meters of each other, for more than 15 minutes, in a small space with limited ventilation, and/or taking deep breaths while exercising. Therefore, indoor sports are considered high risk, while outdoor sports are considered to be low or medium risk. Other sports within the province that are already playing games between associations are lower risk as they are being played outdoors. Consideration to allowing competition sooner will be made as the season develops and the presence of COVID 19 in the community is better understood.

Question

COVID-19 form must be presented prior to each session. Can associations make digital COVID-19 forms to be completed prior to entering the facility?

Answer:

Yes, in fact a number of minor hockey associations have already been looking into developing these digital COVID-19 smartphone apps. The Hockey NL office can put associations into contact with other associations already working on smartphone apps.

Question

If guidance changes, or facility access requirements change, is Hockey NL expecting associations to revise and resubmit our Return to Hockey plans? If so, are we required to redo the parent and player training stated in Phase 1?

Answer:

If guidance from Hockey NL changes it will not be necessary for associations and leagues to revise and resubmit their Return to Hockey plan. If there are significant changes to facility access requirements then it may be appropriate to advise Hockey NL of the change and any adjustment to the approved Return to Hockey plan required. The Communications Officer for the association or league will be responsible for communicating any changes with their members.

Question

How can associations implement a Pre-Novice or Learn-to-Skate program while maintaining physical distancing of 2 metres or 6 feet?

Answer:

Pre-Novice or Learn-to-Skate program involve a lot of hands on interaction between the children and the coaches. Hockey NL will be providing addition guidance on how to work with these young children prior to the start of the 2020/2021 season.

Question

Why are associations being asked to develop their own Return to Hockey plan when Hockey NL has already developed a plan?

Answer:

It is recognized that every association and facility is unique, requiring its own individual plan in many respects. The associations' Return to Hockey plans must align with the Hockey NL Return to Hockey plan, the Government of Newfoundland & Labrador Sport Guidance and the specific requirement of their facility as established by the facility's management and/or community council.