



SPMHA START OF SEASON PLAN

(AUGUST 25, 2020)

Further to the recent [“Return to Play” documents](#) released by Hockey Alberta and Hockey Edmonton, and taking into consideration the additional current guidance provided by Alberta Health, SPMHA has spent a considerable amount of time determining an appropriate course of action for the upcoming season. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced us to think differently about the way we operate for the 2020-2021 season and into the future.

Recognizing that there will be programming differences this season, the SPMHA Board of Directors is focused on a plan to meet the needs of the players as we remain focused on the health and safety of our participants, officials, coaching staff, and community. The fun and enjoyment of the sport for our players, as well as their continued growth and development of skill, remains a priority for our Executive. We strive to continue to develop leaders in our community, while doing so in a socially responsible manner.

This SPMHA Start of Season Plan will address:

1. Recommendations From Governing Bodies
2. Seasonal Structure
3. Evaluations
4. Cohorts
5. Schedule
6. Registration Fees
7. FAQs

Recommendations From Governing Bodies

Facilitating a *safe* return to hockey that meets the guidelines of Phase 2 of Alberta Health’s Relaunch Plan is paramount. Hockey Alberta advises utilizing two distinct procedures in delivering programming:

- Physically distanced skill development
- Utilization of sport “cohorts” as defined by Alberta Health

Seasonal Structure

The Edmonton Federation Hockey League (EFHL) will be abiding by the recommended seasonal structure set out by Hockey Alberta, in conjunction with Alberta Health. Hockey Alberta has outlined the segmentation of the 2020-2021 season into distinct sections including:

1. The Development Season
2. Modified Competition Season
3. Traditional Gameplay

The Development Season

SPMHA will be entering directly into the Development Season through the creation of Divisional Cohorts of no more than 50 players, including team officials. For more information on the determination of these Divisional Cohorts, please review the *Evaluations* section of this document. These Divisional Cohorts will be made up of 2 to 4 “Development Groups” that will practice and engage in gameplay. SPMHA recommends traditional gameplay (5-on-5) when possible, but understands that modified gameplay such as 4-on-4 or 3-on-3 may occur depending on numbers available each week. This gameplay will not be sanctioned by Hockey Alberta and as such, there will be no officials nor will there be disciplinary action by Hockey Alberta or the EFHL. Games will be managed by the leads of the respective Development Groups. This structure will maintain throughout the duration of Phase 2 of Alberta Health’s Relaunch Plan. Registrants will still have insurance coverage as registered Hockey Canada participants. Unlike most other insurance policies available to sports organizations, as a sanctioned member of Hockey Alberta & Hockey Canada, any participant of our program is covered for infectious disease (inclusive of COVID-19) under our collective insurance policy through September 1st, 2023.

SPMHA is exploring the feasibility of providing additional development opportunities to further enhance the developmental experience. These may be carried out within the cohorts or offered as an additional physically-distanced development opportunity to those who are interested. This may include additional skills training (Power Edge Pro), power skating, goalie training, etc.

Modified Competition Season

When the Government of Alberta restrictions on travel and the number of people allowed in a gathering are lifted, Hockey Alberta and the sanctioned Leagues will have a plan in place for a safe and productive transition into a ‘Modified Competition Season’. This Modified Competition Season will not commence (for any level of hockey) before November 1, 2020. Depending on the Government of Alberta guidelines and recommendations, the start of this component could be delayed until later in the 2020-21 season.

- Teams will be grouped into regional ‘Pods’, by level of hockey, for competition purposes.
- A Pod will include 3-5 teams, depending on Government recommendations.

- Teams will only play within their Pod for the duration of this component.

This would be the timeframe in which SPMHA would enter the Team Creation phase of Evaluations (below).

Traditional Gameplay

A variety of gameplay options have been discussed among the EFHL and its interlock partners. As of the writing of this document, the EFHL has created a return to gameplay outline with various starting dates ranging from as early as November 1, to as late as January 1. The objective of the EFHL is to provide a regular season's worth of games to participants, highlighting that there would be more games later in the season to make up for the deferred start date. This pertains to a standard gameplay model in which divisions are created and gameplay occurs within those divisions with no restrictions on cohort sizes.

An optional gameplay method of round-robin play, or a showcase structure, has been discussed if we are unable to return to play as outlined in the first option. This would consist of 2-team or 3-team cohorts that play a series of games followed by a 14-day isolation period where they could practice with their teams but not engage in additional gameplay. Once that 14-day period concluded, a team would then be grouped in a different cohort to play another series of games. It is recognized that a 50-person limit in a cohort does not lend favor to traditional hockey roster sizes and this is currently being addressed with Alberta Health by both the EFHL and Hockey Alberta.

Evaluations

It is the belief of the Board that the approach outlined below will offer a more comprehensive evaluation, and will result in a more balanced and accurate team selection process.

Over the past few seasons, SPMHA has continued to refine and adapt its evaluation process, inclusive of subjective and objective evaluations of both individual skill and game play. This process has been undertaken to align with the recommendation from Hockey Canada as it pertains to the evaluation process for minor hockey associations. For the Development Season, SPMHA will be deferring traditional evaluations, as it is just not feasible under current Alberta Health restrictions. It is the Board's position that our participants and their families will already be experiencing the additional stress of returning to school with new COVID rules in place, and that it would be socially irresponsible to hold such evaluations in our community at the same time. Further, this will allow our participants to get out on the ice earlier than prior seasons, and in a safe and familiar environment. We are therefore taking a three-step approach to the season:

1. Development Group Placement
2. Baseline Evaluations & Development Season Feedback
3. Team Creation
4. Goalies

Development Group Placement

NOTE: These Development Groups are not the final teams that will move into league play if, and when, a regular season commences.

A Placement Matrix is being prepared for each division to place registrants into Development Groups that will make up Divisional Cohorts. Items for consideration in this Placement Matrix include, but are not limited to: the historical progression of participants in our program (a large majority of our players follow the same general progression through the years); previous skills assessment result of the registrant; feedback from respective divisional Coaches in the prior season; and discretion of the Divisional Director and his/her respective Vice-President. Each Divisional Director, together with the applicable Vice President, will utilize the Placement Matrix to place players within a Divisional Cohort and in a Development Group. Each Development Group will be assigned a Lead, that will operate as the coach of the group during the Development season, as well as 2-3 on-ice assistants.

Baseline Evaluations & Development Season Feedback

Once players have been placed in the Divisional Cohort, the Development Groups will be provided with ice times for practice and gameplay. The SPMHA Board will look to run a baseline skills evaluation of players within their Divisional Cohorts between late-September and late-October. This will allow us to identify each player's relative skill assessment within his/her Division while doing so in a reduced-stress, cohorted environment. It will also provide us with a foundation for team creation in advance of the EFHL season starting. Given the current environment, and subject to Alberta Health's Relaunch Plan, should a season start date be deferred beyond November 1, the Board of Directors may consider running another evaluation of players within their Divisional Cohorts at a later date.

The Divisional Directors will maintain consistent contact with the Development Leads to get feedback on players within the Development Groups. The purpose of this communication will be to identify those players that may be suitable candidates for movement within tiers during the Team Creation phase. This feedback will be supporting information to the baseline evaluation results.

Team Creation

Once one of the regular season gameplay models is greenlit, we will enter the Team Creation phase. As noted above, the Divisional Directors along with their respective VPs may utilize the results from the baseline skills evaluations as well as the development season feedback to complete player movement within tiers. The intent will be to create appropriate team sizes in accordance with the Alberta One Tiering Model while reflecting the abilities of the players at that specific point in time. This will be subject to the transition from Stage 2 to Stage 3 in Alberta Health's Relaunch Plan. We cannot confirm if an isolation period will be a part of this plan or not.

Goalies

Goalies may still be subject to skills evaluations as it is believed with confidence that this can be carried out safely due to the reduced number of goalies. This would be for the purposes of trying to place goalies in Development Groups and may pertain more specifically to the U11 division in which first-time goalies, graduating from U9, do not have any skills evaluation history with SPMHA.

Cohorts

Hockey is a contact sport, and while we can operate skill development sessions using physical distancing, we understand that in order to provide meaningful competition and meet the key objectives of our program, we will need to use cohorts for various phases of our *Return to Play*. We are excited about the possibilities that the Development Season might allow us to explore in our programming and how that directly impacts the cohorts. It is Hockey Alberta's designation that gameplay should remain within a geographical region that includes the Alberta Health Services Zone. Because of this, consideration is being made to potentially include neighboring associations such as Strathcona Minor Hockey within our Cohort groups. Additional cohort details include:

Discovery & U7

- maintain single year age groups
- maintain modified gameplay models including cross-ice, half-ice or variations thereof, as part of the Hockey Alberta Intro to Hockey model
- gameplay will be 4-on-4, or 3-on-3 if fewer players are available
- divisional Cohorts may be created based on random selection
- practice and gameplay will occur within the Divisional Cohort

U9

- maintain half-ice gameplay as part of the Hockey Alberta Intro to Hockey model
- gameplay will be 4-on-4, or 3-on-3 if fewer players are available
- team sizes may range between 10-18 players pending registration numbers
- practice and gameplay will occur within the Divisional Cohort

U11/U13

- recommended to participate in traditional 5-on-5 gameplay
- modified gameplay (i.e. 4-on-4, or 3-on-3) will be acceptable if fewer players are available
- team sizes may range between 13-17 players (inclusive of goalies)
- practice and gameplay will occur within the Divisional Cohort

U15/U18/U21

- recommended to participate in traditional 5-on-5 gameplay

- modified gameplay (i.e. 4-on-4, or 3-on-3) will be acceptable if fewer players are available
- team sizes may range between 13-17 players (inclusive of goalies)
- there will be both body checking and non-body checking cohorts.
- practice and gameplay will occur within the Divisional Cohort

Goalies

- may be 1 or 2 goalies per Development Group
- where appropriate, this is also a great opportunity to encourage our goalies to skate as players and give players the opportunity to try goalie

Schedule

The County of Strathcona will be reducing flood times between scheduled sessions from 30 minutes to 15 minutes as of September 1st. We are working with representatives from the County regarding guidelines on facility access and will report when there are updates.

Players will be notified of their Development Group placement no later than 5-7 days prior to their first skate. Players may be on the ice as early as:

- U9/U11 - September 8th
- U13/U15 - September 12th
- U18/U21 - September 19th
- Discovery/U7 - September 23rd

Precursor: The following is not written in stone. It can be assumed with confidence that questions are going to be asked around the ice scheduling. The following is simply an example of what it might look like.

We are unsure exactly what a breakdown of ice times and full-ice to shared-ice practice ratio might look like at the moment. There are a lot of options available. To provide an example, in a 3-team cohort, we could run 3 shared practices per cohort per week (A+B, B+C, A+C). Each Development Group would get two practices. Follow this up with one intrasquad game each week and one additional practice. (A vs B, C practices, rotate week to week), or split the 3 Development Groups into 2 larger teams to play a full 5-on-5 intrasquad game.

Registration Fees

We are currently "in waiting" regarding a multitude of fees that we incur as an Association on behalf of our members and direct onto our members through registration fees (i.e. league membership, officials, etc.). As a not-for-profit youth sports association, our objective is always to offer programming in a cost efficient manner. We ask for patience from our membership as we navigate an unusual situation in which we are seeing both increases and potential decreases in Association-related expenses. We are cognizant of the standard offer that our players receive for their registration fees and will consider the impact of the current season on this offering. A review of this impact as it pertains to fees will be completed at the end of the season. Forms of

refund (i.e. fund transfer, registration credit, etc.), if any, will be communicated at that time. We will not be exploring any form of refund prior to the end of the season that does not align with the refund policy outlined in our [Policies & Procedures](#) document.

FAQs

Can my child be a part of multiple 'Cohort Groups'? As an example, can they belong to a Football 'Cohort Group' as well as a Hockey 'Cohort Group'?

SPMHA asks its members to follow the recommendation of Alberta Health, which suggests that athletes should not belong to multiple sports mini-leagues; they should select one sports cohort for the duration of Stage 2. They would be permitted to belong to another sports cohort that is operating under the 'Physical Distancing' guidelines. For example, a power skating or skills program that is utilizing 'Physical Distancing.'

Do athletes and coaches have to maintain physical distancing at all times, or can it just be minimized?

When using 'Cohort Group' procedures, participants are reminded to minimize the amount of contact during off ice and dressing room situations.

Why is Physical Distancing mandatory on the players bench and in dressing rooms if they are within their 'Cohort Group'?

This is an Alberta Health guideline and a Hockey Alberta mandate. Technically, there should be no activities with any close contact. However, if the activity must have close contact, such as hockey, then the contact should only take place when it is necessary. All other efforts to 'Physically Distance' must be taken including on players benches and dressing rooms.

Why might Development Groups be smaller than regular team sizes?

In facilities that cannot accommodate physical distancing for regular team sizes, smaller group sizes will be considered. As per Alberta Health, even while using cohorting, physical distancing should be maintained in all aspects of hockey activity except while participants are on the ice. (For example, dressing rooms, benches, and in public areas).

Smaller Development Groups also allow for increased gameplay options within a cohort (instead of having only 1 group to compete against in gameplay, you may have two or more).

What is the plan for coaches within the cohorts? What happens if the coaches are unable to attend a session?

Teams will be assigned a Development Lead, who will operate in the same facet as a Head Coach, as well as on-ice assistants. If there is a situation in which Cohorted Coaches cannot attend, a backup plan may include another coach that is physically-distanced at all times, and must be masked at all times (including on the ice).

How will players released from SPKAC be dealt with for evaluations and placement?

SPMHA will be coordinating the timing of the formation of our Cohorts at the U13, U15 and U18 levels with the release dates from SPKAC and they will be placed in a Development Group in the same manner as those players that do not tryout for SPKAC.

How will SPMHA handle contact tracing and symptom screening?

Hockey Alberta has set guidelines to follow to ensure all interactions are tracked and that symptomatic players do not participate in any activities. We are actively considering different solutions to make this process as efficient as possible for athletes, parents and associations. However, regardless of the process, this will be a required step prior to participation in any session.

What happens if a player answers yes to any of the symptom screening questions?

Any player who answers YES to any of the questions may not participate further and is subject to both Alberta Health & Hockey Alberta protocols on return to activity.

What happens if there is a positive test within a 'Cohort Group'? If that participant gets tested again and the result is negative, can they return to Hockey activities?

Should this situation arise, we will refer to the Alberta Health & Hockey Alberta protocols that are in place at that time.