

## Real-World Guide to Storing Hockey Equipment

Be honest: What happens to the hockey bag at the end of the season? You come home from your last game of the long season, pull it out of the car, toss it in the garage and forget about it for the time being, right? The next time you open the bag—whether it's a week from now for a skating lesson, a month from now for a spring league or five months from now for tryouts—one thing is for sure: It's going to stink.

Smell is not the only problem, however, as players can easily get infections from unclean gear. Plus, that equipment is not going to grow or repair itself in the bag in the off season. We know you're busy, but it's important to drag that bag into the house right now and spend a few minutes cleaning it out and surveying the equipment. It shouldn't take more than 15 minutes to figure out what needs to be cleaned, repaired and/or replaced.

**Quick Tip:** Ready to stop reading because you're just not going to deal with this now? That's fine, just do yourself a favor. Go outside and least open the bag so the equipment has a chance at drying. (Secret: That's what I'm going to do. I'm also going to hang up the sticks so they don't get run over by bikes...)

In researching this topic, I read pages and pages of laugh-out-loud advice about cleaning and storing hockey equipment—"If there is any odor at all, it is important to clean the gear right away" and "Only use your hockey bag to transport your equipment never for storage" are two favorites. Then, I isolated the most practical and pertinent steps for you:

- \* **Wash & Toss:** Throw all the socks, practice jerseys, Under Armour, etc. in the wash, using a disinfecting cycle if you have one. Then, before you spend time cleaning, survey your equipment. If something is flat out ruined—a cracked helmet, for example—toss it now.
- \* **Skates:** Be sure your skates are clean and dry, then put deodorizing foot powder in them.
- \* **Pads:** You can find plenty of instructions online for washing pads in the washing machine or bathtub, or you can use a professional service. Just be sure to check the cleaning guidelines from the manufacturer\*.
- \* **Helmet:** As mentioned, first check the helmet for cracks. If it's cracked, replace it before you skate again. If it's in good shape, clean it according to manufacturer guidelines.
- \* **Mouth Guard:** Clean the mouth guard by brushing it with toothpaste, rinsing it with mouthwash or running it through the dishwasher. If you don't have a storage container for it (which you should also clean), put it in a baggy.
- \* **Bag:** Clean the inside of the bag with disinfecting spray or wipes. If necessary, spray the bag with an odor eliminator.
- \* **Repack:** Once all the clothing and gear is really dry, you can repack the bag for storage. Throw in a few dry sheets to keep it smelling fresh and leave the bag slightly open. (In a humid climate, you might want to hang up the gear rather than cramming it in the bag.)

If any of your nice, clean equipment has reached resale or hand-me-down status, set it aside. This is a good time to buy new equipment as it's often on sale, and you can work on finding used equipment a new home over the summer. As you repack, check the condition of your equipment—do you need laces, a mouth guard, a helmet strap? If you're not going to handle this now, at least leave a note in the bag so you'll know what to do before you skate again.

\*No, we don't really think that you save all those little booklets that are attached to new hockey equipment, and we couldn't find downloadable versions of them online. You may need to call or stop in at a local hockey store and take a look at cleaning guidelines.

Editor's Note: Thank you to Kelly Kordes Anton for this story. Written by Kelly Anton · Filed Under Featured , Parenting