

So, you want to play hockey (or your son or daughter does), but you're not sure where to start. The first step is going to be purchasing ice hockey gear. This article goes over the basic ice hockey equipment requirements needed to get on the ice.

1. **Hockey Skates:** Skating is the foundation for the game of hockey. If you can't skate, you can't play the game. So, it's important to get the best skates you can afford. Make sure to have them properly sharpened before you take the ice. You can buy skates new or used. Either is fine. Just keep in mind that you'll want to buy skates that are about one to two sizes smaller than your shoe size.
2. **Shin Guards or Shin Pads:** There are two standard types of shin guards. One that has a strap that goes around your leg and velcro's onto the other side of the pad. Or, the type that has no strap and requires you to use hockey tape to get it to stay secured on your leg. It's a matter of preference. These are fine either new or used.
3. **Hockey Pants or Breezers:** These are a pretty basic item. The better lines have good support for the tailbone and thighs. These are fine either new or used. Some of the styles will have suspenders to hold the pants up, others will have a tie at the waist to secure them. It's just a matter of what you like.
4. **Chest Protector or Shoulder Pads:** For young kids (Mites through Squirts), mid-range shoulder pads are fine. But, once you are at a level that allows body checking, you're going to want pads with a lot of support at the shoulders and chest. This isn't an item you want to skimp on. Purchase the highest quality pads you can afford. New or used are both fine. Just check the integrity of the shoulder and chest areas on any used pads you are considering.
5. **Hockey Jock (shorts with built-in jock):** This is pretty self-explanatory. There are actually two types of jocks available for hockey. The old school type (when that was all they had) and the new type of hockey shorts with the built-in slot for the jock to slip in. This is a matter of preference. Obviously, you're going to want to buy this item new.
6. **Mouth Guard:** A lot of people think the mouth guard is just to protect your teeth. While it does provide protection for the teeth, another function of the mouth guard is to prevent a jarring hit to your brain. Never skimp on the mouth guard. Look at high end mouth guards like Shock Doctor, or have your dentist recommend a good orthodontist who can have one custom made for you.
7. **Neck Guard (optional):** While this is an optional item in most leagues, the neck guard is becoming more and more popular as they keep replaying the NHL accident that shows what can happen when you take a skate to the throat. It's frightening enough to cause even the hardcore old-school hockey player to reconsider donning a neck guard.
8. **Elbow Pads:** While the kids are young, mid-range elbow pads are fine. But, as they move into Peewee hockey (and above) you're going to want to put them in a quality pair of elbow pads. Make sure they are large enough to cover the entire elbow, as well as a portion of the forearm. These are fine to purchase new or used.
9. **Hockey Helmet:** This is the one item we don't recommend purchasing used (although there are exceptions out there). Helmets take a lot of abuse in the upper levels of play and you never know how many hits a helmet has taken. So, always try to buy this item new. You can never pay too close of attention to protecting your head.
10. **Hockey Gloves:** The hockey glove should feel like a large pair of winter gloves (a bit loose). The palm will be made of soft leather and the fingers will be a bit stiffer. These are fine to buy either new or used, however, make sure the palms are not worn through (which happens frequently with most players). Otherwise, you may get sent off the ice by the ref until you get it repaired.
11. **Hockey Stick:** This is a piece of equipment that dozens of articles could be devoted to. There is a wood stick, a composite stick, and a two-piece stick. Those who love each type are

loyal to their sticks. If you're just starting out, go with a wooden stick. It's less expensive and will get you in the game without a big cash layout. Also, for kids, there is virtually no benefit to an expensive graphite or composite stick. They don't have the physical strength to even utilize them correctly yet. If you have a left-handed player and aren't sure which way they'll shoot -- go with a straight blade. Within a short time you'll see which way they naturally shoot. It isn't unusually for lefties to shoot right (or visa versa).

12. **Hockey Jersey (usually provided by the team):** This is an item you probably won't have to worry about. Teams typically provide the jerseys.
13. **Hockey Socks:** To keep your skates in good condition, always put your socks on before your skates. You would think people would instinctively know that, but they don't. Every season I see kids with their socks shredded by skate blades.

The above is just basic ice hockey equipment information to get you started. Hockey is the greatest sport in the world and it brings families together like no sport I've ever seen. My son starts his ninth year of travel hockey this season and it's never lost its charm to us.

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