

Covid Q & A: How will the new state guidelines impact Hockey and the WHC?

Are Travel Tryouts and Pre-season Travel Clinics Impacted?

We are proceeding with pre-season travel clinics and tryouts as planned. The latest state guidelines limit us to non-contact skills training, which is really no departure from previous years. We have assembled a team of coaches led by Hockey Director, Evan Nielsen, and Director of Player Development, Bobby Acri. These clinics will be a great way for all our skaters to kick off the season.

How Will Restrictions Impact Tryouts?

Tryouts in the past have been designed differently according to age and skill levels. At the younger levels the focus has traditionally been on assessing core skills; we want to see who skates well and possesses core hockey competencies. At older levels, tryouts have been scrimmage-oriented: we want to see how they play in more game-like situations. This year, tryouts will be modified in accordance with the new state guidelines and we believe we can still evaluate every player and determine the best-fit team for them.

How Much Ice Time Will We Have?

Our Club contracts large quantities of ice at both North Shore and Winnetka Ice Arenas. We rent smaller amounts at Wilmette and Watts in Glencoe. The WHC season for travel is typically September 1-March 1 for travel, while house league goes deeper into March.

The new restrictions will not impact the amount of ice time for each team. Based on feedback from both our strategic plan as well as the year-end evaluations, we made it a goal to ensure ALL our Squirt-Bantam Travel teams to receive three weeknight ice times a week between team practices and skill sessions. The game ice, normally Friday-Sunday, will now be used for additional practice time. We estimate each Squirt-Bantam team will have approx. 105-110 ice touches for the season, for an **average of 4.5-4.75 slots weekly**. Mites will average 2.5 weeknight practice and skills sessions, or approx. 95-100 for the season, for *an average of 4.25-4.5 slots weekly*.

Our House program will follow a similar model starting in late September; two ice sessions weekly with skills and station-based training. We expect House League players to have approx. 40 ice touches for the season.

When Will Games be Permitted?

No one knows the answer to this. Guidance from the Governor's office lacks specifics, and as such the governing bodies (AHAI, CUHL, NIHL) are limited in what they can communicate to the clubs. We are in communication with our neighboring clubs daily and have a great dialogue of possible plans moving forward.

There are many scenarios: Could games start in November and extend the season through spring break? Could games start after the first of the year and extend into April? We just do not know. Right now, the only thing we know for certain is that these guidelines take effect August 15. When they change is anyone's guess.

How Will WHC Fees be Potentially Impacted?

These restrictions *may* impact the fees our members pay. The WHC has several costs that will not change, such as ice time, full-time staff, coaching staff, insurance, bookkeeping, audit, and so on. Nevertheless, there are potential scenarios that might impact fees, including:

- If there is a reduction in games played, the Club will incur less expense on referee fees;

- The WHC, unlike most programs in the area, includes tournaments in the season fee charged to participants. Most clubs charge a separate “slush fee” to cover tournaments in addition to the fees charged by the club. Typically, teams play in 2-3 tournaments annually. The WHC covers entry fees (typically \$1,200-\$1,800) in addition to coaches’ expenses of mileage, hotel, and per diem. This can add another \$1,500 if there are three coaches. Currently, AHAI (Amateur Hockey Association of Illinois) is not granting travel permits for out of state play, and at this time, it appears most clubs are either not traveling or greatly reducing traveling out of state. If this continues, there would be a reduction in tournament/travel expenses.
- Conversely, the season could extend longer into March, possibly April. This would require additional ice to be purchased to keep teams going – in other words, an *increase* in Club expenses.

To address these possible scenarios, the Club plans on dividing the fees into five payments (from three) for travel. We anticipate adjusting fees, if necessary, towards the final payments of the season.

What Safety Protocols Will be in Place?

Safety of players, coaches, and spectators will guide all our decisions. In addition to the safety-related policies and procedures already in place, we have established a “Covid Committee” consisting of staff (Tom & Evan) as well as Anthony Savino, MD, Dania Lees, MD (mother to four Warriors) , and Sara England, RN (mother to two Warriors) We expect the recommendations from this committee to be communicated and in place at least one week prior to clinics. Both ice rinks have strong rules/procedures in place already and have served participants well over the past two months.

What is the Club’s Position on Hockey’s Classification as ‘High Risk’ and What Advocacy is Being Done?

We continue to strongly advocate for a re-classification of youth hockey from its current designation as a “high risk” activity to “medium” or “low risk.” We have yet to receive a credible explanation for why basketball or soccer are considered “medium” risk, and hockey is not.

We also believe there should be modifications to the most recent guidelines, which seem inconsistent with the National Federation of State High School Associations. With appropriate safeguards in place, such as arena protocols, limiting use of locker rooms, “full shields” on helmets, etc., we believe we can play safely as we have the past two months.

In these times, sports participation is important for children. We are committed to supporting the health and safety of WHC participants and our communities while delivering the best hockey experience for all.

Lastly, we have been in contact with many state representatives from throughout the area on this from both a Club and league perspective. Please reach out to our Illinois House Representative Robyn Gabel: www.robbygabel.com to express your thoughts.

We will add more information as it becomes available.