



2026 and 2027 Ice Hockey Rules Changes

Division I Men's Oversight Committee Approved - June 24

Division I National Collegiate Women's Ice Hockey Committee Approved - June 22

Divisions II and III Playing Rules Oversight Panel to Review - July 22

#	Rule	Recommendation and Rationale	DI M	NC W	DII/III M	DIII W
Section 1						
1	Rule 3.1 Player's Benches	<p>Recommendation: The accommodations provided, including bench height and number of doors must be similar for both teams.</p> <p>Rationale: Uniform bench and access-door accommodations for both teams preserve the principles of fairness, neutrality, and consistent game operations.</p>	X	X	X	X
Section 2						
2	Rule 7.2 Starting Lineups	<p>Recommendation: If the team that scores a goal on the first shift of the game challenges the starting line-up of the opposing team and the opposing team did not have the correct starting line-up, the scoring of the goal would nullify the bench minor penalty, and no further penalties would be assessed.</p> <p>Rationale: The goal counting eliminates the minor penalty in most other game situations and should be the same here.</p>	X	X	X	X
Section 3						
3	Rule 9.3 Protective Equipment	<p>Recommendation: Require that all players wear cut-resistant protection on the neck, wrist, and socks beginning with the 27-28 season for Division I and 28-29 for Division III.</p> <p>Rationale: The adoption of mandatory cut-resistant protection standards reflects the continued emphasis on student-athlete safety and injury prevention.</p>	X	X	X	X
4	Rule 9.4 Helmets	<p>Recommendation: A player who intentionally removes their helmet during play will be assessed a minor penalty. If a goalkeeper intentionally removes their helmet and/or facemask when the opposing team is on a breakaway, a goal will be awarded to the non-offending team.</p>	X	X	X	X

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		<p>Rationale: This rule reinforces the importance of mandatory protective equipment and promotes player safety by prohibiting the intentional removal of helmets during live play. In addition, the automatic goal provision for goalkeepers who deliberately remove their helmet and/or facemask during an opposing breakaway preserves competitive fairness by eliminating the opportunity to intentionally create a stoppage of play to negate a clear scoring opportunity.</p>				
		Section 4				
5	Rule 19 Coincidental Penalties	<p>Recommendation: During the last five minutes of regulation or at any time in overtime, when a minor penalty is assessed to a player of Team A, and a major penalty is assessed to one player of Team B at the same stoppage of play, the three minute (or one minute, if A is serving a double minor) differential shall be served immediately.</p> <p>Rationale: During the final five minutes of regulation and at any time in overtime, the immediate serving of the differential between coincidental penalties ensures that the penalized team does not gain an unintended advantage through penalty timing administration.</p>	X	X	X	X
6	Rule 20 Major Penalties	<p>Recommendation: A second major penalty in the same game is an automatic game misconduct.</p> <p>Rationale: Major penalties are reserved for serious infractions. When a player commits a second major foul in the same game, the automatic game misconduct reflects the seriousness of repeated dangerous actions and helps protect player safety</p>	X	X	X	X
7	Rule 28.2 Major or Misconduct Penalty to Goalkeeper	<p>Recommendation: A goalkeeper shall not be sent to the penalty bench for an offense which incurs a major penalty.</p>	X	X	X	X

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		<p>Rationale: Goalkeepers occupy a unique role with specialized equipment and substitution requirements. Having another player serve the major penalty maintains the full penalty consequence without unnecessarily disrupting game flow or creating avoidable safety and administrative issues.</p>				
8	Rule 28.4 Goalkeeper's Privileged Area	<p>Recommendation: Remove the Goalkeeper's Privileged Area.</p> <p>Implementation in 27-28 for Divisions II and III</p> <p>Rationale: Obsolete rule in most other levels of hockey</p>	X		X	
9	New Rule 28.4 Trapezoid	<p>Recommendation: Establish the Goalkeeper's Trapezoid</p> <p>Implementation in 27-28 for Divisions II and III</p> <p>Rationale: The trapezoid is designed to create more contested puck situations and encourage offensive pressure. Restricting where goalkeepers can handle the puck behind the net prevents teams from neutralizing forechecks too easily and helps generate more sustained offensive-zone play.</p>	X		X	
		Section 6				
10	Rule 47.1 Face Masks	<p>Recommendation: Add other helmet openings to the foul of Face Mask.</p> <p>Rationale: Expanding the rule beyond the traditional face mask improves safety, creates more consistent enforcement, and addresses dangerous actions that can place stress on the head and neck area.</p>		X		X
11	Rule 48.1 Fighting	<p>Recommendation: Edit the definition of fighting to be "one player punches or attempts to punch an opponent repeatedly". Singular punches to be penalized as roughing.</p> <p><i>In the Women's game only:</i> A major penalty of roughing to be permissive for a "sucker punch".</p>	X	X	X	X

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		Rationale: This change draws a clearer line between a fight and a single act of punching, so officials can apply penalties more consistently. Repeated punches remain fighting, while a single punch is treated as roughing. In the women's game, a "sucker punch" is treated more severely due to the elevated safety risk and lack of opportunity for response or self-defense.				
12	Rule 49 Head-Butting	Recommendation: Allow a minor penalty to be called for an attempted head-butt or a head-butt that is not done forcibly. Reserve the Major and Game Misconduct penalty for a forcible or egregious head-butt. Rationale: This change creates a clearer penalty scale for head-butting. Minor penalties apply to attempts or non-forceful contact, while more severe, intentional head-butting actions continue to carry major and game misconduct penalties. The goal is more consistent enforcement and better alignment between the severity of the act and the penalty assessed.	X	X	X	X
13	Rule 50 Checking From Behind	Recommendation: Remove "in open ice" from the checking from behind rule. Rationale: The revision simplifies penalty application for officials by eliminating discretion between a minor and major standard on checking-from-behind fouls. Officials can utilize other fouls such as "charging" for open ice hits from behind when warranted.	X	X	X	X
14	Rule 53.3 Hitting after the Whistle	Recommendation: Eliminate "hitting after the whistle", classify this contact as roughing or unsportsmanlike conduct, when it occurs. Rationale: Contact occurring after the whistle is typically retaliatory, unnecessary, or confrontational in nature and more appropriately fits within existing categories that already address avoidable physical altercations and player behavior.	X	X	X	X

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15	Rule 55.5 Throwing the Stick	<p>Recommendation: Change the penalty for throwing the stick outside the playing area from a Misconduct to a Game Misconduct.</p> <p>Rationale: Reinforces the emphasis on player safety and sportsmanship by addressing behavior that presents unnecessary risk to participants, fans and officials.</p>	X	X	X	X
16	Rule 55 Goalkeeper Leaving Stick	<p>Recommendation: If a goalkeeper, upon leaving the ice, leaves the stick or other equipment, or piles snow that stops an imminent goal, a goal shall be awarded.</p> <p>Rationale: Similar to existing awarded-goal provisions for fouls committed during clear scoring opportunities, this revision restores equity when an imminent goal is prevented through illegal tactics rather than legal play.</p>	X	X	X	X
Section 7						
17	Rule 59.1 Interference	<p>Recommendation: When any member of the defending team, including the Coach or any non-playing person, throws or shoots any part of a stick or any other object or piece of equipment at the puck or puck carrier in his defending zone, a penalty shot shall be awarded.</p> <p>Rationale: This rule addresses deliberate actions involving the use of abandoned or broken equipment, or other debris, to interfere with the puck or puck carrier. Assessing a penalty shot provides a strong deterrent against this behavior and ensures that a clear scoring opportunity is restored when an infraction directly impacts play.</p>	X		X	

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Section 8						
18	<p>Rule 64.4 High Sticking</p> <p>Recommendation rescinded by Division I Women's Ice Hockey Rules Subcommittee and Divisions II and III Ice Hockey Rules Committee.</p>	<p>Recommendation: Permit high sticking the puck anywhere on the ice.</p> <p>Rationale: This change removes the stoppage when a player plays the puck with a high stick. The focus is on keeping the game flowing and rewarding skill, while still maintaining strict penalties for any high sticking that involves contact with another player.</p>		X		X
Section 9						
19	<p>New Rule Delay of Game</p>	<p>Recommendation: In the event that the puck is shot into the end zone by the attacking team from their own side of the center red line, and the opposing goalkeeper freezes the puck resulting in a stoppage of play, the ensuing face-off shall be conducted at one of the end zone face-off spots in the goalkeeper's defending zone.</p> <p>The defending team shall not be permitted to make any player substitutions prior to the face-off. However, a team shall be permitted to make a player substitution to replace an injured player, or when a penalty has been assessed which affects the on-ice strength of either team.</p> <p>Rationale: This rule is designed to keep the game moving and prevent teams from using a goalie freeze as a way to slow play or gain a line change advantage. The face-off location rewards territorial pressure, and limiting substitutions ensures the defending team cannot use the stoppage for strategic rest unless it's for injury or penalties.</p>	X	X	X	X
20	<p>Rule 79.5 Spitting</p>	<p>Recommendation: Spitting to be penalized as a Game Disqualification.</p> <p>Rationale: Spitting is treated as an immediate removal offense because it presents both a health risk and a serious sportsmanship</p>	X	X	X	X

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		issue. The penalty reflects zero tolerance for conduct that endangers others and is considered fundamentally unacceptable in the game.				
		Section 10				
21	Rule 81 Faceoffs	<p>Recommendation: Require that the blade of the stick is flat on the ice during faceoffs.</p> <p>Rationale: This creates a consistent standard for all faceoffs and removes tactics like angling or lifting the blade to gain an advantage. It makes enforcement clearer for officials and ensures a fair, repeatable faceoff procedure in every situation.</p>	X		X	
22	Rule 86.1 Offside	<p>Recommendation: A player must control the puck with their stick prior to their skates going into the offensive zone.</p> <p>Rationale: The goal is to make zone entries more controlled and less based on skating through a loose puck. Players must clearly possess the puck with their stick before entering the offensive zone, which helps reduce offside confusion and encourages more structured offensive play.</p>	X	X	X	X
23	Rule 84.2 Hand Pass	<p>Recommendation: Permit hand passes that are initiated and completed in the defensive zone.</p> <p>Rationale: The rule is designed to reduce stoppages for technical infractions that do not create a competitive advantage in dangerous areas, while improving flow and defensive-zone problem-solving.</p>	X	X	X	X
24	Rule 84.4 High Stick	<p>Recommendation: When a high-sticking the puck violation by the defensive team in the defensive zone, a change of players will be permitted by the offending team.</p> <p>Rationale: Match the line change procedures of other leagues.</p>	X			
25	Rule 84.3/84.4 Faceoff Location following hand pass or high stick	<p>Recommendation: The faceoff location following a hand pass or high stick violation will take place at the faceoff dot nearest the point of the infraction with the least territorial advantage gained.</p>	X	X	X	X

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		Rationale: This approach minimizes disproportionate territorial penalties for non-penalty infractions, improves consistency in officiating decisions, and supports continuous play.				
26	Rule 92.2 Timeout	Recommendation: You may not use your timeout if your team is not allowed to change players due to an infraction. Rationale: Allowing a timeout in such situations would undermine the competitive consequence of the infraction by enabling a reset of lineup conditions.	X			
27	Rule 92.2 Timeout	Recommendation: Eliminate the additional timeout in overtime during the regular season. Rationale: This change keeps overtime moving by reducing stoppages. Teams still retain their regulation timeout, but no extra timeout is added in overtime, encouraging quicker resolution and more continuous play during the extra period.	X		X	
28	Rule 92.2 Timeout	Recommendation: Only one timeout will be permitted per stoppage, regardless of which team has called the timeout. Rationale: This prevents both teams from using multiple timeouts during the same stoppage to extend delays. It keeps the game moving while still allowing each team reasonable opportunity to use timeouts strategically within separate stoppages.	X			
29	Rule 91.2 Shootout	Recommendation: Eliminate the mandatory shootout at the end of extra periods. Defer procedure to conference policy. In non-conference games, the policy of the home team's conference will be followed. In neutral site games, the policy of the designated home team or in-season tournament will be followed. Rationale: This change gives conferences control over how games are decided after overtime, whether that is a tie, extended overtime, or a shootout.		X		X
		Section 11				

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30	Rule 93.4 Coaches Challenge	Recommendation: Allow a coach to challenge when a minor penalty for goalkeeper interference and the goal is disallowed. Rationale: Permitting a coach's challenge for disallowed goals due to goalkeeper interference introduces an additional layer of review for one of the most subjective goal review categories. The provision is designed to improve accuracy in determining whether interference materially affected the goalkeeper's ability to play their position	X	X	X	X
31	Rule 93.4.c Coaches Challenge	Recommendation: Require a coaches challenge for an unobserved act that would lead to a major penalty of a player. Rationale: This change ensures that if an act was not directly observed by officials, it must be initiated through a coach's challenge and confirmed via video before a player is removed.	X	X		
32	Rule 93.4 Coaches Challenge	Recommendation: Permit only one coaches challenge per stoppage by the same team. Rationale: Reduces the potential for compounded delays arising from sequential reviews initiated by the same team during a single stoppage, while still allowing meaningful access to video review for eligible situations.	X		X	
33	Rule 93.7 Video Review Not approved by NC Women's Ice Hockey Committee. Rescinded by the Divisions II and III Ice Hockey Rules Committee. This will be considered by Championships Committees to be implemented by their policies.	Recommendation: Require all goals be cleared in NCAA Tournament games. Rationale: Every goal in the NCAA Tournament would be automatically reviewed before being confirmed. The goal is to eliminate missed calls in the most important games of the season and ensure that all scoring plays are validated consistently using available video evidence.		X		X

#	Rule	Recommendation and Rationale	DI M	NC W	DII/III M	DIII W
		Section 12				
34	Rule 94 Body Checking	<p>Recommended Change: Restructure Rule 94 to provide clarity on legal body contact and illegal body checking. Guidance will be provided to allow legal contact on parallel pursuits, end-wall pursuits, forward angling, corner defense, and 50/50 puck battles. Illegal methods continue to include overt extension of the shoulder, arm or torso, opposite direction hits, and driving through opponents.</p> <p>Rationale: This rule language update is intended to improve the consistency and clarity of the body contact standard in women’s ice hockey. The revision better defines legal competitive contact associated with angling, positioning, puck pursuit, and contested puck battles while continuing to prohibit deliberate body checking and forceful physical play.</p> <p>The updated language with situations provides officials, coaches, and players with clearer guidance regarding acceptable body contact, particularly in transition play, puck retrievals, and contested possession situations where incidental or competitive contact is expected.</p> <p>This clarification supports more uniform rule enforcement nationally while maintaining the women’s game’s emphasis on skill, puck possession, positioning, and player safety.</p> <p><i>Please see the full write up of the new Rule 94 below.</i></p>		X		X
		Appendices				
35	Appendix B Shootout	<p>Recommendation: All players are eligible to participate in the shootout unless they are serving a 10-minute misconduct or have been assessed a game-misconduct or Disqualification penalty.</p> <p>Rationale: This change makes shootouts more about the full roster available at the end of the game. Players are only excluded if they are serving a major disciplinary penalty or have been removed from the</p>	X	X	X	X

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		game, ensuring coaches can use their best available players for this deciding format.				
		Other				
36	Exhibition Games	<p>Recommendation: Define exhibition games and require that all NCAA Ice Hockey Rules will be followed in these formats.</p> <p>Rationale: Exhibition games are still NCAA games in terms of rules. Even though they don't count toward standings, they must be played under the full NCAA rulebook so that players, coaches, and officials are operating under the same standards as regular-season and tournament competition.</p>	X	X	X	X

New Language of Rule 94.1 Body Checking

Body checking is not permitted in any area of the ice. Body checking occurs when a player delivers a distinct and definable moment of impact using overt (blatant) hip, shoulder, arm or torso action attempts to separate the puck carrier from the puck.

PENALTY—A minor, major and game misconduct or major and disqualification, at the discretion of the referee.

2026-27 NCAA Women's Ice Hockey Point of Emphasis: Modernizing the Application of Rule 94 (Body Contact)

Goal: To promote a fast, physical, and skilled game by providing clear distinctions between *legal tactical contact* and *illegal body checking*. The focus is on rewarding players who use superior angling and positioning to win puck possession and to further prepare the puck carrier to expect body contact.

Body Contact – Women's ice hockey permits competitive body contact that results naturally from angling, puck pursuit, and lane control in the course of legally playing the puck. Players may use body position to impede or contain opponents; however, forceful body checking intended primarily to separate the opponent from the puck through impact remains prohibited.

Legal Body Contact Mechanics – To be considered legal body contact, the initiating player must:

- Maintain a skating lane or angle consistent with the puck's location.
- Shoulder-to-shoulder contact from a position even or ahead of an opponent is to be expected.
 - Contact initiated from a position behind an opponent and where it is reasonable to believe they cannot expect contact (vulnerable) may be deemed a penalty.
- Keep the stick on the ice or in a position to immediately play the puck.
- Avoid any distinct and definable moment of impact using overt (blatant) hip, shoulder, arm or torso extension to deliver force (opposite direction hit).
- Avoid any "explosive" upward or outward motion (driving through the opponent).

Interpretations and Scenarios

To ensure consistency among officials and players, the following scenarios are classified as Legal Body Contact:

Scenario 1: Parallel Possession Pursuit

The Play: Two players are skating in the same direction while one has possession. The defending player is even with or ahead of the puck carrier and initiates shoulder-to-shoulder contact to lean the opponent off the puck. **The Ruling:** Legal. Provided there is no extension or "opposite direction" hitting motion, using body weight to separate an opponent from the puck while moving in the same direction is a fundamental defensive skill. (Note: this holds true anytime players are moving in the same direction including when one player is skating forward and the other is skating backward.)

Note: Creating contact from a body position behind the puck carrier should be called a body check due to the blind-side nature of the hit as the puck carrier is deemed vulnerable/defenseless.

Scenario 2: The End-Wall Pursuit

The Play: During a pursuit below the goal line, the second player into the zone maintains one hand on their stick and the other guides the puck carrier with a hand on their hip. The pursuing player makes contact to guide the opponent into the boards, keeping their stick on the ice and releasing immediately once the opponent's momentum is neutralized. **The Ruling:** Legal. This is considered "steering" rather than "boarding" or "checking," provided the player does not extend to shove the opponent excessively.

Scenario 3: The Forward Angle & The "Cut-Back"

The Play: A defender has established a forward angle on a puck carrier. As the puck is released, the defender finishes the angle, resulting in contact. Alternatively, the puck carrier "cuts back" into the space already occupied by the angling defender, causing a collision. **The Ruling:** Legal. A player is entitled to their skating lane. If the defender is committed to a legal angling route, they are not required to vacate that space if the puck carrier creates the collision by changing direction into them or tries to continue a route through ice that is not available.

Scenario 4: The 50/50 Puck Battle (Falls under Rule 59: Interference until possession is determined)

The Play: Two players approach a loose puck. Both players engage in body contact to "win the lane" or create a "bubble" of space to protect the puck once it is gathered. **The Ruling:** Legal. Players entering a 50/50 battle must expect body contact. As long as the contact is a byproduct of winning the lane and does not involve an opposite direction hit with extension, no penalty shall be assessed. **Guidance to Officials:** When evaluating contact that results in a player going to the ice, the official must judge the action, not the outcome. If the action was a legal attempt to win a lane or maintain puck possession, the play shall continue. The deciding factor between a Minor Penalty for Body Checking and Legal Body Contact is the delivery. A player may position their body to impede, but they may not propel their body to impact.

Note: Body contact that occurs without puck possession falls under the guidance of Rule 59: Interference to determine a penalty.