Rule 5.9.9 – One-Way Electronic Communication Devices

An exclusively one-way electronic communication device may be used by the defense to relay a pitch or play from the dugout to the field. If it is an in-ear/hat/helmet audio earpiece device, only the catcher may wear it. A digital transmission device (typically a watch-like wristband) may be worn by any player on defense.

One-way electronic communication devices are only permitted to be used while on defense. It is encouraged players remove the device while on offense. If a player(s) continues wearing the device while on offense, it shall not be used in any capacity. Players are encouraged to wear the one-way electronic communication device on the opposite arm from the signal arm band to avoid potential conflict/questioning of their use while at bat. A batter should not be looking at their one-way electronic communication device since these devices may only be used on defense. The umpire will issue a warning to a batter who consistently looks at their one-way electronic communication device while on offense, including before stepping in and while in the batter's box. If the batter does not comply, they will be asked to remove the device while at bat.

If this becomes an issue during the season and there are concerns that these devices are being used on offense by a signal, sound or vibration, all players may be required to remove the one-way electronic communication device while at bat. The aim is to ask everyone to respect the rules as written, use them as designed to be used and not attempt to circumvent them for reasons that are not healthy for our game.

Conferences are encouraged to monitor the use of these devices within their conference and take appropriate action, including requiring the devices to be removed, if there are issues/concerns with devices being used illegally while on offense.

Umpires – If a team is illegally using a one-way electronic communication device while on offense, please email your conference coordinator and Vickie Van Kleeck, NCAA Softball Secretary-Rules Editor, at ncaasbsre@gmail.com.

Rules 10.1, 10.2, 10.2.2 and 10.2.3 – No Violation for Pitcher Looking for Signal Off Pitcher's Plate

With the addition of one-way electronic communication devices, the rules and interpretations should allow all defensive players the same opportunity to receive signals, especially defensive signals. The updated interpretation allows pitchers to look at a one-way electronic communication device or signal arm band prior to being positioned on the pitcher's plate without penalty. This includes defensive or pitching signals. This will no longer be ruled an illegal pitch.

Even if a signal was taken before contacting the pitcher's plate, once in the legal position on the pitcher's plate, the pitcher must give, take or appear to take a signal as stated in Rules 10.2.2 and 10.2.3. The pitcher may not simply step into the pitching position, put their hands together and start the pitching motion.
As always, once the pitcher contacts the pitcher's plate, if the pitcher takes a signal while in an illegal position (e.g., pivot foot in contact with the pitcher's plate and entire stride foot outside the 24-inch length of the pitcher's plate), it is an illegal pitch. Once the pitcher contacts the pitcher's plate, the only signal that is to be given or taken is from the legal pitching position outlined in Rules 10.1.1 and 10.2.1. Rules 10.2.2 and 10.2.3 for how the signal is given, taken or appeared to be taken also must be followed.

A.R.s 10-1 and 10-3 in the online 2024 and 2025 Softball Case Book have been updated to reflect this updated interpretation.

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED INTERPRETATIONS
September 14, 2023

Rules 2.34, 6.7, 10.18 and 11.2.1 – Time Between Pitches and Visible Action Clock Guidelines

1. The pitcher has 20 seconds from when they receive the ball from the catcher to separate their hands which indicates the beginning of the pitch. Violation of this results in a ball being awarded to the batter.

2. The batter has 10 seconds to take their position in the batter's box. Violation of this results in a strike being assessed to the batter.

3. The catcher has 10 seconds to take their position in the catcher's box. Violation of this results in a ball being awarded to the batter.

4. For the first pitch of each half-inning, following an umpire's call of “time”, or if the ball becomes dead (e.g., after a foul ball or a pick-off that goes out of play), the time shall stop, reset, and start again when the plate umpire signals “play” after the pitcher takes their position on the pitcher’s plate with possession of the ball, the catcher is in the catcher’s box, and the batter is in the batter’s box.

5. For the first pitch of any subsequent at-bat, the time shall start when the plate umpire signals “play ball”.

6. After each pitch during an at-bat (following the first pitch) in which the ball remains alive and in play and the batter remains at bat, the time shall start when the pitcher has possession of the ball in the circle and the catcher is in the catcher’s box. Note: Clock also starts on any dead ball brought live on the plate umpire’s verbal or hand signal.

7. When using a timing device not managed by the plate umpire, the plate umpire should signal when the time should begin.

8. The time shall stop under the following circumstances:
   a. The pitcher separates their hands which begins the motion to deliver the pitch;
   b. With runners on base, the pitcher calls time and steps off the pitcher’s plate;
c. The catcher leaves the catcher's box to give defensive signals or to confer with the pitcher from a distance (in which case the time shall stop, **reset**, and start again after the catcher returns to the catcher's box);

d. The batter calls “time”; or

e. The umpire calls “time” for any legitimate reason.

9. Violations of the time between pitches/visible clock are not subject to video review.

**Timing Device Options:**

NOTE: Timing devices may be used to assist in enforcing all timing rules (i.e., time between innings, time between pitches).

1. Umpire counting;

2. Non-visible device managed by an umpire (e.g., stopwatch, handheld timer, belt/waistband timer); or

3. Visible device managed by an umpire or other personnel (e.g., on a video or scoreboard, standalone clocks).

**Rule 5.9.9 – One-Way Electronic Communication Devices**

1. Only allowed to be used by defensive players to call a pitch or a play.

2. Digital signal devices (e.g., wristband) may be used by any defensive player.

3. In-ear/hat/helmet audio devices may only be used by the catcher.

4. Batters should not be referring to their electronic one-way communication device while at bat.