**U11 (Atom) Player Pathway**

The U11 (Atom) Player Pathway is supported by the Hockey Canada Long-Term Player Development Model. This framework provides the guiding principles for age appropriate and skill specific programming for all players in Hockey Canada’s youth hockey system. By utilizing LTPD principles, Hockey Canada membership offers systems and structures that are more consistent and ensure continuity as players move through the system from one age level to the next.

 Player development is at the core of the U11 (Atom) Player Pathway, with a focus on skill development so that each player will experience success in both practice and game settings. When viewing from the perspective of how kids learn the number of repetitions of specific skills and situations that occur in practice versus a game we quickly learned where players have a chance to develop the most: practice.

**About**

The U11 (Atom) Player Pathway is a progressive learn-to-play teaching curriculum. This pathway is an important component in the transition from U9 (Novice) and serves as preparation into U11 (Atom). The U11 (Atom) Player Pathway consists of four phases of instruction, designed for players graduating from U9 (Novice) hockey and for entry-level hockey players who may start playing hockey at this age level. The curriculum introduces, develops, and refines the skills of skating, passing, puck control, and shooting in a progressive, step-by-step manner.

This is to be viewed as an opportunity for young players to develop and refine fundamental movement skills (skating, turning, acceleration), manipulation skills (shooting, puck control, passing) and overall motor skills (balance, coordination, agility) in a fun and safe environment, promoting skill development through self-confidence. The main goal of the U11 (Atom) Player Pathway is to continue to have fun while developing skills. When players continue on a positive note, they enjoy the game and will go on to have fun playing hockey for many years.

The U11 (Atom) Player Pathway provides an environment that helps all players at the U11 (Atom) age level (9 and 10 years old) to realize their full potential. Hockey Canada strongly believes that in order for players to truly fulfill their potential and be the best they can be, the needs of the player should be at the forefront of the programming.

The primary focus of the youth hockey system is to develop a lifelong passion for sport, develop important life skills through hockey and provide young players exposure to a development system that is progressive in nature and meets their needs based on age-specific and skill-appropriate programming.

**Implementation for the 2020-2021 Season**

All U7 (Initiation), U11 (Novice) and U11 (Atom) players within Hockey Canada programming will be playing the entirety of next hockey season with the implementation of the U11 (Atom) Player Pathway.

Starting in the 2020-2021 season minor hockey players, including those in the Ontario Hockey Federation’s Member Partners ALLIANCE, GTHL, OMHA, NOHA and the OWHA will be following the U11 (Atom) Player Pathway.

Player Pathways, as we have seen with U7 (Initiation) and U9 (Novice) Programming are progressive, learn-to-play development guides that support the player development continuum from U7 (Initiation) through to U11 (Atom). The Pathways outline optimal seasonal structures and age appropriate development guidelines.

The U11 (Atom) Player Pathway consists of a policy and recommendations focused on the appropriate development for 9 and 10-year-old players. The U11 (Atom) Pathway delivers a number of benefits to participants and their families including creating a positive experience during evaluations by providing planned pre-evaluation ice sessions, avoiding evaluations the first week of school, and allowing all U11 (Atom) players to be actively playing for 100% of the season.

U11 (Atom) Player Pathway Policy (must be followed for the 2020-21 season):

1. No evaluations from March through August. Preparation phase can begin the Tuesday following Labour Day.
Benefits: This process gives minor hockey associations and parents back their summer. The season doesn’t need to start this early only to be finished at the end of January or February; instead, it should start later and also end later. This also allows minor hockey associations a chance to get organized and begin planning.

  2.  No evaluations the first week of school where school starts the week after Labour Day.

  3.  Must offer a minimum of 4 practices / skill sessions prior to formal evaluations beginning.
       Benefits: A player’s first experience in the new hockey season should not be a formal tryout - this gives all players           the opportunity to get back on the ice in a more ‘player-friendly’ scenario before being evaluated. Minor hockey               associations will have the opportunity to run their own prep camps instead of members spending money outside the         association.

  4. Must have a minimum of 3 formal evaluation sessions – Recommended - 1 skills session, 1 small area games session,
      1 game.
      Benefits: Players need a fair chance to be evaluated – a standardized process will show transparency, fairness, and          consistency. This also provides coaches with the foundation for a development plan based on a solid and quantifiable        evaluation.

   5.  Teams must have a period of development time following team selection and prior to the start of the regular season.
        Benefits: It is very important to provide coaches with the opportunity to develop and improve their players skills              prior to getting into organized games. The progression should be skills before tactics and tactics before systems.

   6.  Playoffs must be tournament style playoffs versus elimination rounds.
        Benefits: This gives all teams the chance to play to the same end point in the season. All players deserve the same
        chance to play to the end of the year, with more teams and more players playing longer into the season. This also
        allows more rest and recovery within the season and the regular season schedule can be spread out. In addition to
        providing a greater opportunity for players to participate in different activities.

   7.  Fair/equal ice time (goalies rotate for equal games/playing time through season and playoffs)
        Benefits: Fair and equal ice time is designed to ensure that all players get the same opportunity to contribute to the          outcome of games, regardless of skill or ability. A coach’s responsibility is to develop all players to contribute.                  Shortening of the bench is not permitted. All players should receive fair and as close to equal as possible ice time,            including equal opportunities on special teams.

   8.  Limit position specific specialization (except goalies), All skaters are to rotate through all positions to ensure each              player has the opportunity to try out each position (forward – LW/C/RW and defence ‐LD/RD) at least once.
        Benefits: Players may determine that they wish to be a full-time goaltender, but it is important for all players to                learn the fundamentals of every position for the overall development of the player.

**U11 (Atom) Pathway Recommendations (Members should encourage and support):**

1. Season should allow for two (2) seasonal breaks (not including Christmas / long weekends) comprised of 5 days where no scheduled games or mandatory practices take place.
2. Recommended maximum of 45 games per year (including tournaments and playoffs).
3. Small Area Games in practice / Station based practices
4. Ideal Seasonal Structure:
5. Preparation/Evaluation Phase: The period of time prior to the season starting. Please see numbers 1 through 4 in Policy. (Up to 4 weeks)
6. Development Phase: The period of time following tryouts prior to the regular season starting. (Up to 4 weeks, 8-12 practices, 2 exhibitions games)
7. Regular season: The period of time from the first regular-season game to the start of playoffs (Up to 24 weeks, 22-44 practices, 16 to 20 games)
8. Playoffs: The period of time from the end of the playoffs to the start of the next Preparation/Tryout Phase. Commencing after March 15. Up to 4 weeks. Must have tournament-style playoffs.
9. Offseason Phase: This refers to the period of time from the end of the playoffs to the start of the next Preparation/Tryout Phase.

With the implementation of the U11 (Atom) Player Pathway, Hockey Canada has made key changes to the Player Pathways at U9 (Novice) and U7 (Initiation) that will create consistency in all programming across the country and a seamless transition for players from U7 (Initiation) through to U11 (Atom) based on Long Term Player Development.