

EQUIPMENT 101 – When is it important to wear your equipment properly with the proper fit = **EVERYTIME YOU STEP ON THE ICE!**

Helmet Properly Fastened

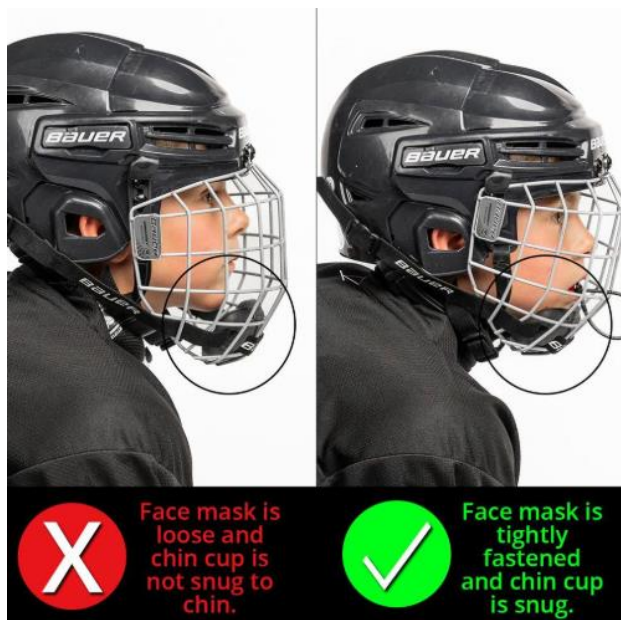
Not having a properly fastened hockey helmet greatly increases the risk of severe head injuries, including concussions, because the helmet can slip or fall off, leaving the head unprotected during an impact. A properly fitted helmet is essential for absorbing impact energy and protecting the brain from trauma. If a helmet is not snug and the chin strap is loose or undone, the helmet's protective cushioning cannot properly align with the head, and the helmet could be dislodged, making it ineffective at the critical moment of a collision.

Why a Fastened, Properly Fitted Helmet is Crucial

A loose or unfastened helmet can fly off during a fall or check, leaving the head exposed to impact from the helmet, ice or a stick. A helmet that is not snugly fitted cannot absorb the force of an impact, and the protective foam liner will not stay in place to cushion the brain. Studies suggest that inadequate helmet fit is associated with a greater risk of concussion. A poorly fitting helmet can lead a player to believe they are protected when they are not, potentially leading to riskier behavior.

How to Ensure Proper Fit

- **Snug All Around:**
A helmet should fit snugly without gaps between the helmet pads and the head.
- **Correct Placement:**
The helmet should sit low on the forehead, with about a finger's width between the eyebrows and the helmet and should not shift or slide on the head.
- **Secure Chin Strap:**
The chin strap must be fastened and tightened so the helmet stays in place, even with movement.



WHAT'S THE POINT?

Goaltender Masks

Cat-eye masks, popularized by professional goaltenders, are illegal for youth and high school players. These masks lack certification by the HECC (Hockey Equipment Certification Council) as required by USA Hockey, due to the larger eye openings that expose young goaltenders' eyes to stick contact. Since cat-eye masks have been restricted at the youth levels, manufacturers have developed a modified cat-eye mask that meets HECC standards and is approved for play. While these masks are considered safe for goalies, they also create confusion about which masks can be used. The chart below outlines the three most common types of goalie masks:



Checking for Approved Cages: When checking cages, ensure the spacing between the bars is not wide enough for a hockey stick blade to pass through, as this indicates an illegal cage.

Coaches and parents are encouraged to educate themselves on the differences between various types of goalie masks on the market. The safest way to find a legal mask is to look for a valid HECC certification sticker on the mask and helmet.

Identifying Approved and Illegal Equipment:

- **HECC Certification:** Look for the HECC sticker on helmets and masks. This sticker confirms the equipment meets required standards and includes an expiration date to ensure the equipment remains up to date.
- **USA Hockey Rules:** According to USA Hockey regulations, all players, including goalkeepers, must wear HECC-approved helmets and face masks.
- **Illegal Equipment:** Cat-eye masks with large eye openings are generally not approved for youth and high school players due to safety concerns. Additionally, helmets with modifications or painted logos that could compromise the helmet's structure or HECC certification are considered illegal.

Ear Guards

All new hockey helmets come with USA Hockey-compliant ear guards already installed. If you need a replacement or a universal option, several manufacturers offer replacement loops or hard-shell ear covers. It's important to confirm that the guards are appropriate for your specific helmet model and that they are worn correctly for USA Hockey-sanctioned play.

Neck Laceration Protectors

Players competing in youth, girls, high school or junior hockey within USA Hockey are required to wear neck laceration protectors (NLPs) for all games and practices. In addition, on-ice officials under the age of 18 as well as players in all six disciplines within USA Hockey's disabled hockey program are also required to wear NLPs.

"The focus and commitment to safety is evident each and every day at USA Hockey and this new requirement is a positive step forward in helping ensure the safest possible environment in our sport," said Kevin Margarucci, manager of player safety for USA Hockey.

CHOOSING THE BEST NECK LACERATION PROTECTOR

Choose a neck laceration protector with cut-resistant material that covers as much of the exposed neck area as possible. The protector should be worn properly without any alteration.

IN-GAME ACTION

Rule enforcement will be the same as any other protective equipment violation - the first violation will result in a player substitution and a team warning. Any subsequent protective equipment violations by the team during the game will result in a misconduct penalty.

If a player loses their neck laceration protector during play, it is treated the same as a mouthpiece. Play will continue until the next stoppage, then the player must replace the equipment or undergo a substitution.

Hanging throat protectors for goaltenders are not designed to prevent lacerations from skate blades and are not a substitute for a neck laceration protector.