2026 FIELD HOCKEY RULES SUPPLEMENT

MHSAA PLAYING RULE ADOPTIONS

I. Goal-Differential Rule

a. The 8-goal differential rule is in effect for the MHSAA Tournament and regular-season varsity play. It is optional for leagues and schools to adopt for subvarsity regular-season competition. A game shall be terminated when a team is ahead by 8 goals or more any time after the second quarter is completed. (Note: officials must be aware of this adoption by schools or leagues before the contest begins). This game counts toward one of the 18 allowed contests.

b. When there is a six-goal differential:

i. The clock becomes a running clock at a six-goal differential (only stopping on injury or time out).

ii. The game clock will revert to normal timekeeping if the goal differential becomes five.

II. Overtime Procedures

- Prior to the start of overtime, there shall be a five-minute intermission.
- The officials shall meet with the team captains for a coin toss. The visiting team captain shall call the coin in the air. In subsequent tie-breaking procedures requiring a coin toss, the call of the toss shall always be the visiting team.
- Players may confer with coaches and substitutions may be made.
- If a combination of overtime procedures is used, there shall be a five-minute intermission between each procedure to provide for meeting with the team captains (including the coin toss).

a. **MHSAA Tournament Overtime Procedures**

The required MHSAA tournament procedures are:

i. Play a 10-minute sudden victory overtime period with a team of six field players and one goalkeeper. Teams do NOT change goals at the end of the regulation game. The winner of the coin toss shall choose to be on offense or defense to begin the overtime period. On a penalty corner, there shall be 3 defensive players and a goalkeeper behind the end line.

ii. If the game remains tied after the 10-minute period is played, then it will go to the one-on-one overtime procedure. A series of five shots on goal shall be taken by individual players in a one-on-one situation (attacker vs. goalkeeper). To begin this procedure, the attacker stands on the 25-yard line and the goalkeeper stands on the goal line. Play continues for 8 seconds (10 seconds on a grass field) with follow-up shots permitted.

NOTE: A foul or violation by the attacker ends the procedure. For an unintentional foul by the goalkeeper, the one-on-one shall be retaken. For an intentional foul by the goalkeeper, a penalty stroke shall be awarded. Any player on the approved roster may take the penalty stroke. The procedure also ends when: (1) the 8 (or 10) seconds has elapsed; (2) a goal is scored; (3) the ball goes out of play over the end line, sideline.

b. **Regular-Season Overtime Procedures**

i. For all regular-season games, play a 10-minute sudden-victory overtime period with reduced player overtime procedures to align with postseason reduced-player procedures.

ii. If the game remains tied after the 10-minute period is played, then it will end in a tie unless it is a regular-season bracketed tournament.

II. Tournament Procedures

a. If an MHSAA Tournament game is suspended and cannot be resumed, it is considered an official game after two complete quarters have been played, provided the difference in score is three or more goals.

MHSAA TOURNAMENT

The MHSAA Field Hockey Tournament will consist of a single division, using a four-Regional format with statewide seeding. Please refer to the Tournament Structure document for a detailed outline including dates.

2026 NFHS PLAYING RULE CHANGES

1-6-1: The rule was modified to clarify that tooth and mouth protectors may not include non-functional or unsafe attachments.
Rationale: The tooth and mouth protector is intended solely to protect the teeth, mouth, and lips. Attachments or components that do not serve this purpose, or that pose a safety risk, are not permitted.

4-4-3: The rule was revised to limit substitutions prior to a penalty corner to goalkeeper safety situations. Substitution is permitted only for an ill, injured, suspended, or disqualified defending goalkeeper. That goalkeeper must be replaced by a properly equipped substitute goalkeeper.
Rationale: Limiting substitutions prior to a penalty corner addresses safety concerns while preserving the integrity and continuity of the penalty corner procedure.

10-3-3 PENALTIES: The rule was clarified to assign responsibility when an attacking player enters the circle early. For an offense of this rule by an attacker who enters the circle before the ball is played, the inserter shall be required to go beyond the center line.
Rationale: Requiring the inserter to go beyond the center line provides a clear, consistent, and easily administered penalty, simplifies enforcement, and promotes proper positioning and discipline during penalty corner setup.

2026 NFHS EDITORIALS CHANGES

1-5-1f: The home team shall wear solid knee-length contrasting dark-colored socks/sock guards (not rolled down) and the visiting team shall wear solid knee-length white socks/sock guards (not rolled down).

10-2-11: Substitution may occur at the completion of the penalty corner. A suspended player returning to the game when a penalty corner has been awarded may only do so after the completion of the penalty corner.

2026 NFHS POINTS OF EMPHASIS

1. Penalty Corners
   a. Retaken vs. Subsequent Corners
   b. Early Entry
   c. Substitution During a Penalty Corner
2. Wire-Caged Face Masks Outside the 25-Yard Line
3. Player Equipment – Tooth and Mouth Protectors

2026 NFHS RULE INTERPRETATIONS

SITUATION 1: A penalty corner has been awarded. Before the ball is inserted, a defending field player becomes ill or injured. The coach attempts to substitute a player from the bench before the penalty corner is completed. **RULING:** Illegal. **COMMENT:** Rule 4-4-3 permits substitution prior to the completion of a penalty corner only for the replacement of an ill, injured, suspended or disqualified goalkeeper. A field player who becomes ill or injured during the setup of a penalty corner may be replaced by another player who is already legally on the field. No substitute may enter from the bench until the penalty corner has been completed.

SITUATION 2: A penalty corner has been awarded. During the setup for the penalty corner, the suspension time for a player expires. The player waits until the penalty corner has been completed before re-entering the game. **RULING:** Correct procedure. **COMMENT:** Rule 4-4-7 requires a suspended player returning to the game to follow the substitution provisions of Rule 4-4. Since substitutions are not permitted during a penalty corner, the suspended player must wait until the penalty corner has been completed before legally re-entering the game.

SITUATION 3: A penalty corner has been awarded. Before the ball is inserted, the defending team attempts to substitute for a field player for tactical reasons. **RULING**: Illegal substitution. **COMMENT:** Once a penalty corner has been awarded, field player substitutions are prohibited until the penalty corner has been completed. The only exception is the replacement of an ill, injured, suspended or disqualified goalkeeper with a properly equipped substitute goalkeeper, as permitted by Rule 4-4-3.

SITUATION 4: A penalty corner has been awarded. Before the ball is inserted, an official observes an unauthorized substitute entering the field. The substitute has not participated in play or influenced the penalty corner. **RULING:** Play continues. **COMMENT:** If the illegally substituted player has not participated in play or affected the penalty corner, the official should allow play to continue and address the illegal substitution at the next appropriate stoppage by assessing the appropriate penalty to the head coach. This prevents a team from gaining an advantage by using an illegal substitution to intentionally interrupt play.

SITUATION 5: A penalty corner has been awarded. Before the ball is inserted, an unauthorized substitute enters the field and participates in or influences play. **RULING:** The official shall stop play immediately. **COMMENT:** Once an illegally substituted player participates in or affects play, the official shall stop play, assess the appropriate penalty, and administer the proper restart in accordance with the rules. An illegally substituted player shall not be permitted to gain an advantage by participating in the penalty corner.

SITUATION 6: During a penalty corner, the defending goalkeeper becomes ill, injured, suspended, or disqualified. **RULING:** A properly equipped substitute goalkeeper shall replace the goalkeeper before play resumes. **COMMENT:** Rule 4-4-3 permits the replacement of an ill, injured, suspended, or disqualified goalkeeper during a penalty corner. Player safety requires that the defending team have a properly equipped goalkeeper before play resumes. If the goalkeeper is suspended or disqualified, the team shall continue play with one fewer field player, as required by rule. If the goalkeeper is ill or injured, the team is not required to play short, provided a properly equipped substitute goalkeeper is available.

Weekly Rule Interpretations can be found here.

INCLEMENT WEATHER

I. On threatening days, game management should consult with contest officials about steps to be followed if conditions worsen.

II. When lightning has been observed or thunder is heard, the contest must be suspended. Officials and game management may consult weather applications to make suspension, resumption and continuation decisions using the following policies:
   a. If lightning has not been observed and thunder has not been heard, the contest must be suspended if independently validated lightning-detection devices or mobile weather applications indicate a lightning strike within 10 miles of the event location.
   b. At night, under certain atmospheric conditions, lightning flashes may be seen from distant storms. In these cases, it may be safe to continue an event before the full 30-minute suspension has expired. If no thunder can be heard and the flashes are low on the horizon, the storm may not pose a further threat. Independently verified lightning detection information would help eliminate any uncertainty.
   c. Severe weather with precipitation (rain or snow) may make the field unplayable.

III. When a contest is suspended, the home school administration shall attempt to arrange for the security of all participants.
   a. When a contest is suspended, the home school administration shall attempt to arrange for the security of all participants. Contestants and support personnel shall be moved to appropriate indoor facilities.
   b. When the contest is suspended, contestants shall not return to the playing field until lightning has been absent from the local sky and thunder has not been heard for 30 minutes unless the resumption criteria in Item II-B above has been satisfied.
   c. Spectators shall be advised of the action being taken to seek shelter. (Some hosts may be able to offer shelter to spectators, but are not required to do so.)
   d. The final decision shall consider liability and conditions of facilities as well as future schedules, the need to play the contest, and finally, the quality of all other options.

Note: MHSAA tournament policies for MHSAA tournament contests, or more restrictive local policies for regular season contests would supersede these policies and should be shared with the opponents and officials prior to the contest, preferably in writing.

Otherwise, and to the extent allowed by the playing rules code, the official(s) shall make the final decision regarding game suspension once the game begins.

REGULAR-SEASON CONTEST DELAYS

When a league or conference does not have a written policy regarding late contest start time, the following MHSAA policy shall apply:

1. If a team fails to arrive for a regular-season contest at the time stated on the contract, it shall be necessary for the host administration to delay the contest, declare the game forfeited, reschedule the contest, or declare the event “no contest.”
2. If the host management has been notified of the reason for the delay and projected arrival, the officials must stand by for 60 minutes beyond the scheduled starting time. When the team arrives, a reasonable amount of time must be provided for the visiting team to conduct a pregame warm-up. In any case, warm-up shall not be less than 15 minutes.
3. If the host management has not been notified that there is a delay and the reason for it, the officials have permission to leave the site, without obligation, 30 minutes after the contracted start time has passed.

(In MHSAA tournament play, the Participating School Tournament Information for each sport will prescribe the specific action to be taken. For regular season play, league and conference policy supersedes the policy above, so coaches and officials should inquire with their league to see if any policy exists.)