

Small-Area Games FAQ

Why reduce the playing area?

Imagine trying to play ringette on a frozen soccer field, then take yourself back to a time when you were still learning to skate and were lucky if you could pass the ring more than a couple of meters.

That is what we are asking young children to do when we ask them to play on a full-ice surface. Reducing the playing area helps to scale the game to the size of its players. The following videos show adult hockey and soccer players explaining what the field of play feels like for kids.

- [Hockey](#)
- [Soccer](#)

USA Hockey used NHL Analytics to measure some of the other benefits of small-area games for 8U players, summarized here:

- [USA Hockey ADM: Analytics of 8U Small Area Games](#)

In specifically considering ringette, here are some additional benefits:

Stronger players cannot skate away with the ring. This helps keep ALL players engaged in the play, reinforcing skill development and providing more challenge in the following areas:

- **Acceleration** – critical to performance at an elite level and a key determinant in maximum speed at older ages. In a study with 8U hockey players, acceleration speeds increased by 10% when the ice surface was reduced. See study [Smaller Ice Surfaces and Skating Development](#) by Hockey Alberta and PowerScout Hockey, [summarized by USA Hockey's American Development Model](#).
- **Change in direction/agility** – smaller spaces with more engagement means more turns, changes in direction and the need to accelerate more quickly; helping to develop the fundamental skills that are necessary at the competitive level.
- **Passing** – when a player can't skate away with the ring, it makes passing a more attractive option, which encourages players to attempt passes and develop both their sending and receiving skills.

Provides greater value for money. Depending on how ice time is managed, small-area games can allow more players to use the ice at the same time by running several games simultaneously or increasing the amount of ice time each player gets, by having fewer shifts. Either way, players and parents win – more people to share the cost of ice rental with or more ice time for every player.

When should the playing area be increased?

Ringette Canada anticipates that the majority of players should be ready to play full-ice ringette when they enter the U12 age division, having progressed from small area play based on their individual skill development prior to then.

In reality, the answer is different for every person and is informed by both their mental, social, emotional and physical development including progression towards adult stature as well as their overall technical and tactical development. Can they consistently send and receive passes in the smaller area games? Are they able to create space for themselves? Are they spatially aware of other players?

Why reduce the number of players?

Reducing the number of players is all about increasing the amount of time on task that each player has and helping to keep players in the [Challenge Zone](#).

More Touches. Fewer players on the ice at a time, means each player has more opportunities to participate in the play, leading to more opportunities to send and receive passes, take shots and make saves, as well as challenge other players one-on-one.

Encourages players to spread out. With fewer players, there is greater benefit for players to spread out and opportunities to create space, without having to go so far that passes become impossible.

Simplified Decision Making. Knowing when to pass, when to shoot and when to attempt to navigate around another player one-on-one is central to being a good ringette player. Making these decisions without thinking is even harder and every player on the ice exponentially increases the number of options available to a player. By reducing the number of players on the ice, we achieve a number of objectives to help players develop their skills.

- **Reduced number of options.** With fewer options, the player has a better chance of making the right decision the first time, and when they don't, they are more likely to remember and be able to make a different decision the next time. Repetition-based learning with knowledge of results.
- **More Frequency.** With fewer options, a player will see the same situations more often, allowing them to learn from their mistakes and apply what they learned.
- **More teachable moments.** With fewer options and a higher frequency of decision, it is easier for both the player and coach to recall a situation and review it.

When should the number of players be increased?

It is all a matter of progression, increasing the number of players on the playing surface is best determined by assessing a player's skill development. As a player becomes proficient in all aspects of the game in a 3 vs. 3 games, it becomes appropriate to progress to a 4 vs. 4 game.

Because each game format presents different challenges, which emphasize different skills, there are benefits to players continuing to play a variety of formats throughout their development. Coaches and local ringette associations are also being encouraged to adjust the number of players based on team sizes to maximize the playing time afforded to each player.

Why are there modified rules?

Modified rules are intended to help support the development process, take into consideration the cognitive development of children, and placing the emphasis on the skills that matter. Children younger than 8 or 9 tend to see most things as black and white, which limits their ability to understand complex rules, often creating a distraction from learning the fundamentals. In some cases, this means adding simple rules. Like each player must touch the ring before taking a shot is easy to understand and promotes passing, while the rule of passing over a blue line only makes sense once players are consistently able to make passes.