



September 23, 2026

NFHS Field Hockey Weekly Rule Interpretations

Rule References: 1-6-1 1-PENALTIES; RULE 3-1-5,6; RULE 6-1-3; Rule 1-9 PENALTIES

Player Equipment—Tooth and Mouth Protectors

Purpose

The purpose of this interpretation is to clarify what makes a tooth and mouth protector legal and why extra attachments or non-protective features may create a problem. The mouth protector is required to protect the player's teeth and mouth. It is not intended to be decorative equipment, a place for accessories or an item that creates additional risk. In elementary terms, the mouth protector should protect the mouth and should not add anything that could hurt the player or another player.

Rule Language

Players must wear a tooth and mouth protector that meets rule requirements and is worn as intended. A mouth protector with an attachment or feature that does not serve a protective purpose, or creates a health or safety concern, is not legal. Officials should address illegal equipment before participation whenever possible. However, if a player is not wearing a mouthguard or chooses not to wear the mouth guard as intended the official needs to assess the player a misconduct penalty at the first stoppage of play following the discovery of the violation. Play is restarted at the point of interruption-there is no change of possession-the issued card is the penalty. RULE 1-6 PENALTIES

Interpretation

Officials are not required to inspect players/goalkeeper equipment prior to the game; however, when performing pre-game check of the goal cages/nets the officials should make sure that the goalkeepers are wearing a mouthguard and wrap around throat protector and that players participating in the pre-game warm-ups with balls and sticks are wearing mouthguards and shin guards. Officials are expected to recognize obvious concerns. If a mouth protector has an added item, attachment, strap, decorative piece or other feature that is not part of the protective function, the official should treat it as questionable or illegal equipment. Coaches are responsible for ensuring players are legally and safely equipped. Players should not alter required protective equipment in a way that changes its purpose.

Game Scenario #1:

During pregame equipment review, an official sees that A4 is wearing a mouth protector with an added decorative attachment. The attachment does not help protect the teeth or mouth. **RULING:** The mouth protector is not legal as worn. A4 must correct the equipment before participating. **COMMENT:** The purpose of the mouth protector is protection. If an added feature does not protect the player and may create a safety concern, it should not be allowed.

Later, a coach asks why the player cannot wear the mouth protector because the player says it is comfortable. **RULING:** Comfort alone does not make the equipment legal. **COMMENT:** Required protective

equipment must meet the rule and must be worn in a safe manner. Coaches should help players choose equipment that complies before game day.

Game Scenario #2:

A1 scores a goal. As the teams return to the center line for the center pass the official notices that A1 is not wearing a mouthguard. The official assesses the Head Coach a misconduct penalty for A1 not wearing the required mouthguard. The goal is disallowed. **RULING:** INCORRECT PROCEDURE

COMMENT: The card is issued to the player, not the Head Coach. Once a coach has verified that the team's players are properly equipped, it becomes the responsibility of the players to remain properly equipped for the duration of the game. The goal stands since A1 is an illegal, not an ineligible player as per the definitions in Rule 3.1.5-6.

Points of Emphasis for Officials and Coaches

Officials should check for obvious illegal or unsafe mouth protectors during pregame and when the issue is noticed during the contest. Coaches should remind players that required protective equipment may not be modified with non-protective attachments. Players should understand the simple standard: the mouth protector must protect the mouth and must not create another risk. If there is an added feature that does not help protect the player, it should be removed or the player should use a legal mouth protector. Consistent enforcement supports player safety and prevents confusion during the game.

EXAMPLES OF **ILLEGAL** MOUTHGUARDS



EXAMPLES OF **LEGAL** MOUTHGUARDS

