

High School Field Hockey Eyewear Rule Altered for 2020 Season

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In response to longstanding concerns regarding the wearing of goggles in high school field hockey, the NFHS Board of Directors approved a change in the eyewear rule that will take effect with the upcoming 2020 season.

Rule 1-6-5 in the NFHS Field Hockey Rules Book, which currently states that “All field players shall wear eye protection that met the ASTM standard for field hockey (2713) at the time of manufacture,” will now state that “Goggles may be worn by all field hockey players.”

In addition to the current rule, an additional note was due to take effect in 2020 as follows: “Beginning in the 2020 fall season, all eye protection shall be permanently labeled with the ASTM 2713 standard for field hockey at the time of manufacture.”

Since goggles were mandated by the NFHS Board of Directors in 2011 with the intent to lessen the risk of catastrophic eye injuries, there have been a number of concerns that led to the current rule modification.

While there is a required ASTM standard for field hockey goggles, there is no NOCSAE standard, which is preferred as NOCSAE’s aim is to protect against worst case injury. The ASTM 2713 standard is not protective against a direct ball to the eye in testing. NOCSAE will not certify any facial/eye protection unless it is integrated into a helmet.

One of the ongoing concerns has been that ASTM-certified goggles are not available for all field players, notably those who wear corrective lenses. Since the current rule cannot be met by individuals with glasses, state associations have been issuing waivers for students with corrective lenses to allow participation.

Also, in addition to lack of available product to meet the rule, no significant research data has indicated that goggles have reduced the number of eye injuries, particularly those of a catastrophic nature.

Finally, while the mandatory eyewear rule was put into effect as a guard against eye injury, the wearing of goggles has created a higher risk concern regarding the penalty corner. Under the current eyewear rule, players cannot remove their goggles to wear full facemasks on penalty corners, which is the most dangerous play in the sport. Now, players can elect to wear corner masks.

The NFHS Sports Medicine Advisory Committee, which was in support of the action by the Board of Directors, noted that the ASTM standard that has been required does not eliminate the risk of injury for which the rule was established (loss of an eye).

“Given the fact that the previous rule that required goggles did not completely lessen the risk of catastrophic eye injuries, and that the product does not exist for players with corrective lenses, and that there is no NOCSAE standard for field hockey goggles, and that the wearing of goggles prevents players from wearing corner masks on penalty corners, the Board believed it was time to make the rule permissive in nature rather than mandatory,” said Julie Cochran, director of sports and liaison to the Field Hockey Rules Committee.

Although the rule has been changed to state that goggles **may** be worn, state associations, schools and parents can still elect to require the use of goggles.