



Age Dispensation Policy

Effective Date: July 14, 2025

Introduction

Rugby Canada and all provincial member unions are committed to providing and maintaining a safe, competitive environment. The *Age Dispensation Policy* aims to protect the safety and welfare of age grade rugby players by ensuring that participants with broadly compatible physical development and skill levels play with and against each other.

A dispensation is given to a player to allow them to play in an age grade that they would not usually be able to play in because of their age. The *Age Dispensation Policy* applies to all competitions sanctioned by Rugby Alberta. It focuses on allowing participants to play Rugby safely and not influence game results.

It is important that all people involved in a decision to permit a junior player to participate in a different age category fully understand that Rugby is a contact sport. Like all contact sports, players are exposed to the risk of injury. This risk could be heightened by allowing players to participate in matches organized for a different age category if their physical development, skill level, maturity and experience differ from that of the players he/she will play with or against.

Eligibility

- 1.1. To be eligible for **senior contact rugby**, players must be turning 18 years of age during the calendar year, providing they comply with the procedures set out below and receive approval from Rugby Alberta.
 - 1.1.1. Front Row players are not eligible for dispensation to senior rugby.
- 1.2. To be eligible for higher **age-grade contact rugby**, players will be permitted to participate in an age-grade match that is not more than two (2) years above their age on January 1st of the year in which the match is held (referred to as the 'two-year window'), provided that they comply with the procedures set out below and receive approval from Rugby Alberta. For example, the two-year window applies to a play.
- 1.3. To be eligible for lower **age-grade contact rugby**, players will be permitted to participate in

an age-grade match that is not more than one (1) year below their age on January 1st of the year in which the match is held, provided that they comply with the procedures set out below and receive approval from Rugby Alberta.

- 1.4. This policy is applicable to contact age-grade rugby due to the increased risk associated with contact situations. Players wishing to play in a non-contact age grade are exempt from this policy and do not need prior approval from Rugby Alberta to do so. These situations should be discussed with the relevant sub-union league coordinators.

Policy

- 2.1 In exceptional circumstances, playing up or down requests may be considered outside the designated age groups, considering the weight, height and experience level of the player and the welfare of other players in that age group.
- 2.2 Each application must include a signed assessment by a qualified coach, a signed confirmation by the player's parent or legal guardian, and a signed medical clearance by one of the following:
 - a Physician
 - a Sports Medicine Physician
 - a Certified Athletic Therapist - must be certified by the Canadian Athletic Therapists Association and hold an active CAT(C) credential.
- 2.3 The Rugby Alberta Application for Dispensation Form must be submitted to Rugby Alberta at least 10 days before the player wishes to participate in any rugby-related activities in the requested different age category.
- 2.4 Applicants must not participate in matches outside their age category until written notification of approval has been received.
- 2.5 Once an age dispensation request is approved, the player will only be eligible to participate in that age-grade for that registration year.
- 2.6 An approved application will only be valid for the year in which the application is made.
- 2.7 Rugby Alberta reserves the right to evaluate and assess players requesting dispensation independently.
- 2.8 Rugby Alberta may independently evaluate a player and move a player to a different Age Grade if it is safer for participants to do so.
- 2.9 The decision of Rugby Alberta is final.
- 2.10 Rugby Alberta reserves the right to change this Policy from time to time at its sole discretion.

Procedure

To apply for an age dispensation, the following steps must be completed:

1. The **Rugby Alberta Application for Dispensation Form** must be fully completed and signed off by the assessing coach, the required medical professional, and the player's parent or legal guardian.
2. The Risk Assessment (included in Appendix A of this policy) must be discussed with the player's parent or legal guardian.
3. The player's parent, legal guardian or rugby club must submit the Application for Dispensation Form to their sub-union administrator for review and sign-off.
4. Once signed off at the sub-union level, the Application for Dispensation Form must be submitted to Rugby Alberta via email at info@rugbyalberta.com.
5. Applicants will receive written notification from the Rugby Alberta office when their application has been approved or declined.

Appendix A - Risk Assessment and Considerations for Age Dispensation

To qualify to provide an accurate Risk Assessment, the minimum qualification required by an Assessor (Coach or Rugby Alberta Management) is to have a current:

- NCCP Competition Introduction (Level 2) certificate; and
- World Rugby Ready Certificate; and
- World Rugby Concussion Management for the General Public Certificate; and
- Coach Registration with Rugby Alberta

In conducting any assessment, the assessor will consider the following:

- What is the player's level of physical development when measured against potential playing colleagues and their team members?
- Is the player physically equipped to compete equally with players in the required age category?
- Will the player skill level place them on an equal basis with eligible players in the required age category?
- Is the competition at a level in which the player can compete **SAFELY**?

Additional factors for assessment are:

- Does the player have a sufficiently high skill level specific to both the playing position and the game's fundamentals?
 - E.g., tackle; pass; ruck; maul; scrum
- What is the player's level of experience?
- Is the player reasonably experienced and has gained the experience in a comparable standard of competition?
- What is the standard of competition in the required age group?
- Does the player undertake a regular strength program?
 - If so, how many times per week?
 - Who provided the program?
 - What was the nature of the program that was completed over the last month?
 - How many years has the player been doing regular strength programs?

Additional important factors for consideration if the players are in a Front Row position:

- How many years of Front Row experience?
- Has the player missed any games due to injury?
 - If so, what was the nature of the injury
- What coaching qualifications does the player's coach have?
- Has the player received any specific Front Row coaching in the last two years?
 - What type?

- Who provided it?
- What are the provider's qualifications and experience?

Finally – the most critical question to be considered:

Does granting this dispensation provide a possible increased risk of injury to themselves or other players?

On completing the Application for Dispensation, this Risk Assessment must be discussed with the player's parent or legal guardian.