Hockey Equipment Cleaning Guidelines

Cleaning Tips

These are recommendations for cleaning and maintaining your hockey gear. Keeping your hockey equipment in top hygienic condition by removing bacteria, odours, dirt, and stains is important to extend the mileage of your gear and reduce the product's ecological footprint.
Note: Hockey gear and equipment that has never been disinfected or deodorized and is very odorous may need several treatments to reduce odours. Using a spray from the start with new gear and equipment to prevent bacteria and odours.

Helmet:
It should be a given but do no soak a helmet. Soap and water mixed with vinegar (a natural disinfectant and natural odour neutralizer that won't damage materials) on a cloth and wipe the inside and outside.
When it comes to the chin cup use tea tree oil, that is found in the form of facial soap or shampoo. It's a disinfectant and great for helping with the red spots you develop on your chin and forehead. Regular cleaning will keep the bacteria under control and skin irritation down.

Skates:
A surface wipe like the helmet. Remove the insoles regularly as it helps air out the skate and reduces rusting of the rivets. Take the skate guards off to reduce rusting from any water that has collected from condensation due to going from ice to a warm area. If you have quick release steel, remove it periodically as rust can form. This is also a piece of kit not to be submerged in water.

Equipment Bag:
If it can be machine washed, then cleaning it that way is an option. If machine wash is not an available option: wipe the inside and outside with the soap and water or the non-toxic cleaner at the bottom of the page.

Jock/Jill:

The plastic insert can be treated with soap and water and using one of the treatment sprays below. Holder can be machine washed with base layers.

Hand washing vs. machine washing: Both hand washing and machine washing are great options when it comes to giving your gear a deeper cleaning than just spritzing them. Hand washing will, of course, be the gentler option; machine washing will be easier. If you've got a top-loading washer, which are the ones with the center agitator, I would only wash base layers in it. If you don't have a front loader, you can go to a laundromat and use the largest front load machine you can find and put in a little less than the full suggested detergent amount.

Hand Wash

Start by filling a sink, tub or large basin with luke warm water and adding a small amount (really do mean small amount) of mild detergent. Can add white vinegar to the water as it is a natural disinfectant (in the UK I have found Amazon to carry 4x 5L jugs for a very reasonable price) which will help neutralize odours. If I am soaking in my bath tub, I will put in 2.5L of white vinegar.

Remove any visible debris or dirt.

Place your shoulder pads, elbow pads, shin pads (remove the liner if it is removeable), pants/shorts/girdle turn inside out if possible (gloves see note below). Using a nailbrush or old toothbrush (soft bristle) to scrub away any dirt or grime. Pay attention to areas with heavier stains or buildup.

Let the equipment soak for about 30 mins - 60 mins. This will loosen the dirt and odours, if they smell particularly strong, let sit closer to the 60 mins with the vinegar in the water. Gently scrub the equipment with the soft brush to remove any stains or dirt that is still present. I do like the agitate every 15 mins.

Drain the sink, tub, basin and rinse the equipment thoroughly with warm water to remove all the detergent. Can also refill the tub with no detergent, let sit for 5 mins, agitate, drain and rinse. Can repeat or use a hose to flush detergent out, you want to get all the detergent out.

Hang the gear to dry in a well-ventilated area that is out of direct sunlight, as prolonged exposure to sunlight may cause fabric to fade, weaken, shrink stitching or warp plastic and protective padding.

Gloves can be added to the same warm water as the other kit but they can be tricker because they are made of different materials, including leather, synthetic fabrics, and padding. Note: should always follow manufacturer instructions for cleaning (you know that tagged on paper, we rarely read).

Use the soft brush and pay attention to the palms and cuffs as the area with most staining or build up.

Rinse until all soap has been removed.

Squeeze out any excess water and use a clean towel to pat the gloves dry. Do not wring or twist the gloves, as this could damage the padding or lining.

Once the gloves are mostly dry, stuff them with clean towels or other absorbent materials to help them maintain their shape and avoid wrinkles.
Finally, set the gloves in a well-ventilated area to air dry completely. Do not put them in the dryer or use direct heat, as this could damage the materials or cause them to shrink.
After drying, if the gloves have leather or the palms are feeling stiff. Apply a very small amount of shaving gel and rub it into the palm area. Allow it to sit for about five minutes then wipe off. This will keep the palm soft.
If you need your kit to have the water removed faster, you can use the machine on a rinse/spin or spin only cycle. Put no more than 2-3 pieces (ie pair of elbow and shoulder pads) of kit in together, to reduce the chance of damage and consider a pillowcase for shin and elbow pads.

Machine Wash – Front load only

I like to keep a close eye on the equipment when I use a machine for them. Each machine will vary, use caution. Should use no higher than 40 degree Celsius water as any higher can damage the equipment.

I will add 1 cup of white vinegar to the pre-wash drawer or put directly into the drum. Machine setting should be delicate/extra delicate/ sportswear.
Do not overload the machine, usually 2-3 pieces of equipment (ie pair of elbow and shoulder pads) consider using pillowcase or large laundry bag for shin and elbow pads as the straps can catch by the door as well as the shin pads wedging against door and friction melting can occur.

Attach Velcro to each other on shoulder straps, pant/short/girdle, elbow pads.

Depending on the spin of the selected wash setting, a spin only cycle might be needed to removed excess water.

Hang the gear to dry in a well-ventilated area that is out of direct sunlight, as prolonged exposure to sunlight may cause fabric to fade, weaken, shrink stitching, or warp protective padding.

Dryer should only be use on air setting if you need to speed up the drying. An oscillating/pedestal fan is also good for rapid drying of kit.

If you have a top load machine, it likely has an agitator in the middle of the drum… it *will* ruin something. **DO NOT** use a top load washer for your protective equipment. Jerseys, pant-shells, base layers, and jock are all fine, but leave everything else for one of the other options.

By following these steps for hand and machine washing, you can help prolong the life of your hockey gloves and keep them looking and smelling fresh for the next game.

Other Drying Options
If you choose to use heat or sunlight, please monitor the equipment. Too high of heat to dry (including sunlight) can cause premature, unseen damage to the surface materials and internal padding which accelerates wear. Keep it off direct heat like radiators. Placing on heaters will melt padding and plastic inside of the equipment.

Electric Heated Indoor Clothes Dryer/ Drying Pod /Rocket Dryer - can be use if it is one with a low heat setting and leaving the top zipper open to dissipate heat. I have used this when I had late night training on a Friday evening, home after midnight and back at the rink for noon.

Dryer with a wool setting that runs about 12 minutes and checking on it, only when I have freshly cleaned the gear. I don't use it to fully dry equipment just to remove excess water.

Sunlight - needs to be monitored (set an alarm or timer) as water drips out it can help accelerate removing water. You do not want to leave it in the sun for long.

De-humidifier placed next to your equipment will draw the moisture out quicker.

Wet/Dry Vacuum and run it over your gear to pull out the water. Care should be used as the suction force can be forceful and could pull at the fabric.

Cleaners: Note - using more doesn't mean it will clean better or a deeper clean. Using harsh chemicals is not advised, like floor or hard surface cleaners (I have seen this advised online). Read the labels and warnings on bottle, that can help determine if I want this on my skin or equipment that could cause breakdown of equipment materials, compromising safety. Fragrant free is preferred but owner option there. Personal preference is using the least amount of chemicals and more natural items.

Mild detergent - sport blend formulas do tend to work better.

White vinegar - Natural disinfectant and odour neutralizer, won't damage materials in your kit nor will it irritate the skin. Helps leaving kit smelling fresh.

Tea Tree Oil - Has powerful antibacterial, anti-fungal and anti-inflammatory properties making it a fantastic natural and safe cleaner. Best used as a spray mix, ready made facial soaps or shampoo with it in it.

Vanish or Oxi Cleaners - Read the labels for proper use, less is better. Not to contain bleach.

Fabric Softener - Never use fabric softener on your equipment as it can cause premature separation of coatings on external materials. It also messes with absorption/breathability of fabrics.

Pet Stain and Odour Remover - An Enzyme formula that eliminates and neutralize stains and odours. Safe on water safe surfaces, fabric toys, upholstery, clothing. Most have a pro-bacteria (using good bacteria) component to break down the organic proteins. Use to get rid of odour as per instructions on bottle. When dry use the between cleaning treatment options to kill bacteria.

Scotchguard - Good option for goalie gear (see goalie equipment cleaning)

Nikwax Tech Wash - helps clean out base layers but won't shrink base layers like using normal detergent.

Febreze - it is more an odour masker than an eliminator and excess chemicals in it. Doesn't kill bacteria unless an antimicrobial version. Read the label and make a personal decision. The chemical in it could cause breakdown of inner materials.

Other sports specific sprays – as long as they kill bacteria, viruses, fungi and gets rid of smells. They tend to be pricier options. Deodorize equipment with sports disinfectant designed for soft and porous fabrics.

Between Cleaning Treatment Options:

These options help to keep the bacteria and mold from setting up camp in your pads. Doing this can help extend the times between needing to fully wash your pads. Use after every game, training. Also great for items not soak washable.

- 70/30 mix (2/3 to 1/3 cup) of rubbing alcohol (91%) and water in a spray bottle. Can substitute vinegar for alcohol.

-Easy make Non-Toxic Cleaner (give the mixture a good shake before each use):

1 cup of water	*½ cup of white vinegar (substitute witch hazel)*
3 drops of tea tree oil	*Optional - add 1-3 drops of an essential oil (citrus, lavender, etc) as the tea tree oil does have a scent*

Pour into a spray bottle.

Goalie Equipment

Goalie Equipment

Your equipment will wear much better if allowed to thoroughly dry between uses. Wet materials are more subject to abrasive type wear. Equipment should be air dried at room temperature. **DO NOT** use heat to dry equipment as this can cause premature, unseen damage to the surface materials and internal padding which will accelerate wear.

Chest & Arm Protectors and Pants:

Should be hand washed only in cold water with a mild detergent. Lightly scrub the item, using a sponge, and then rinse thoroughly. Item should be allowed to air dry.

DO NOT submerge any item in water because item will most likely not be able to dry properly. Moist areas, that do not dry properly can form bacteria and mildew.

Shrinkage is more likely to occur on soaked items as well.

A washing machine is not recommended as water pressure can cause premature separation of coatings on external materials.

You can treat your chest & arm and pants with a spray type of waterproofing, such as Scotchguard. This will also help keep unit cleaner longer. Any kind of treatment that is being applied should be tested on a small area for compatibility before use.

Goal Pads:

Goal pads can also be cleaned with a damp warm rag. They should be allowed to dry thoroughly between uses. The bottom areas of a pad are subject to a great deal of abrasion. Wet materials are softer and will wear much faster.

You should always inspect the toe attaching hardware on your pads. It is a good idea to remove the attaching screws periodically and put a small amount of oil on them to prevent rusting. It is always a good idea to keep spare toe assemblies and hardware on hand in case of emergencies.

Pads will wear much longer if you treat the exterior with a waterproofing agent, such as Scotchguard. This will help repel water off the pad and speed up the drying process.

Air dry pads upside down leaning against a wall. Do not use leather softeners or cleaners. Pads are made with synthetic leather. Do not use Magic Erasers on pads as they contain chemicals that will harm the materials. Be sure to periodically inspect all straps, buckles and hardware on your pads.

Catch gloves and blockers:

Should only be cleaned with a damp warm rag, wiping both the interior and exterior. Gloves need to be air dried. You can also treat the gloves with a spray to help eliminate smell from bacterial growth. You may also treat your gloves with a waterproofing spray.

Be sure to open the back of the trapper when drying. Do not store the gloves at the bottom of your equipment bag. Gloves should be the last thing you put in your bag. Black and coloured tape on the grip area of your stick will discolour the blocker palm. Dye in the tape will cause the blocker (and your stick) to break down faster.

If the palm of your blocker is hard/stiff DO NOT pour water on it. Apply a very small amount of shaving gel and rub it into the palm area. Allow it to sit for about five minutes then wipe off. This will keep the palm soft.

Sprays to Eliminate smell from bacteria growth, mold and mildew, Lysol for soft surfaces (recommended by one goalie equipment manufacturer).
To spot sanitize soft surfaces using lysol:
Spray until fabric is wet.
DO NOT SATURATE.
Fabric must remain wet for 30 seconds.
Let air dry.
For difficult odors, repeat application.

Consider using a Pet Satin and Odour Remover (follow instructions on bottle), repeat if smell isn't gone. Then follow up with a Non-toxic spray treatment.

Goal Mask:
The goaltender's mask must be inspected frequently for any visible damage. If the shell of the mask is chipped, cracked or if any of the internal padding is ripped or unglued, the mask should not be used as the protection may be reduced. If the wire cage has any broken welds, bent wires or other defects, it should be replaced before further use. The mask should not be altered in any way.

Under no circumstances should the mask be painted other than by a ***factory-authorized painter***. Do not drill holes, sand, paint, cut heat, or use solvents or any type of tape or stickers on the mask. Do not install a replacement cage or other components that are not intended to fit the specific model mask. Any alteration of the mask voids the warranty, along with any and all certification, and could potentially cause or contribute to injury to the user.

The exterior shell should be cleaned with a damp non-abrasive cloth and mild dishwashing soap, if needed. The interior foam components can also be wiped down with a damp cloth. The sweatband can be machine laundered and dried. Replacement sweatbands are available.

Never under any circumstances, use any chemicals or solvents to clean the mask.

No Space to Air Dry Equipment:
Possible solutions, maybe they work for you and maybe they don't. Airing out your gear is the most important thing you can do for your equipment. Hang or store equipment in a well-ventilated area and allow to fully air dry. Avoid storing gear in damp, musty environments, which increases the growth of bacteria, mold, mildew, and odour.

Make a wardrobe for your kit to hang in, close the door when all is dry.

Hockey hangers - some great DIY ones online, even possible to hook up fan for airflow if you are handy or know handy people.

Electric Dryers

Drying Line outside, garage.

Rack with a greenhouse cover over top (mostly to keep rain off)

Base Layers:

Neck guard, shirt, shorts, leggings, skate socks, skull cap, bandana, wrist guards, shin pad liners, jerseys, hockey socks, jock holder, garter, short covers. They are all machine washable, using a sports detergent, mild detergent or Nikwax Tech Wash. Again, don't need to use hot water, 40 degrees Celsius or less is optimal. They should be washed after every use when you think of the bacteria count that can be on your equipment. We don't want to overload our bodies with bad bacteria.

Laundry straps and laundry bags are great for keeping your gear all in one place and easy to grab and toss into your bag. Stops having to search for items or possibly forgetting something.

Mouth Guards:

Clean after every use. My secret cleaner is denture tablets that kills 99.9% bacteria let it soak overnight, rinse off and store away.

This is purely a guide to washing your gear, adjust to what works best for you. Important to clean from a hygienic perspective and maintain your gear to last longer.

Compiled by Eh! Hockey, an equipment repair shop in Wakefield, United Kingdom