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Russian Junior Hockey Team to Miss Worlds Over Canada Restrictions, IIHF Confirms

By Reuters

November 16, 2026



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Russia will miss the 2027 World Junior Championship due to entry restrictions imposed by the Canadian government, the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) confirmed on Sunday.

The IIHF said it had considered alternative arrangements but decided Canada would remain as host, with the tournament proceeding from Dec. 26 to Jan. 5 in Edmonton and Red Deer.

Citing Russia's war in Ukraine, Canada's Secretary of State for Sport Adam van Koeverden told Reuters on Wednesday that Canada would deny entry to Russian and Belarusian athletes and officials coming to compete, even those with valid visas.

The IIHF suspended teams from both countries in 2022 after Moscow launched its invasion from Russian and Belarusian territory, although last month’s Court of Arbitration for Sport

ruling ordered the federation to readmit Russian teams to five championships.

The World Juniors were the first of the five tournaments covered by the October 30 ruling. The IIHF said it disagreed with the ruling but would comply.

Prime Minister Mark Carney had previously said Canada would not permit Russian athletes to compete for their country on Canadian soil, a statement some perceived as keeping the door open for their participation as neutrals.

Van Koeverden said Canada allowed neutral participation only by individual athletes, ruling out that option for the Russian team.

The Russian Ice Hockey Federation called the IIHF's decision "unacceptable and unlawful" and said it would appeal to the International Olympic Committee to resolve the situation.

"The IIHF's decision was made solely due to political reasons," it said in a statement.

"The exclusion of the Russian national team violates fundamental legal principles, Olympism, the principle of non-discrimination, equality among athletes and the integrity of international tournaments."

The Canadian government welcomed the IIHF decision.

"Canada's position is unequivocal: until Russia ends its war of aggression against Ukraine, Russian and Belarusian representation should not be permitted in international sport," Van Koeverden told Reuters on Sunday. "This has been the position held by many around the world since 2022. Canada's position will not change, because Russia's actions have not changed."

Russian President Vladimir Putin said earlier this month that countries opposing rulings allowing Russia to return to international sport were violating the rights of Russian athletes and democratic institutions.

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Norway back

The Norwegian Ice Hockey Association said its under-20 team had been reinstated after previously being told it would have to make way for Russia as the lowest-ranked side in the tournament.

"We're very happy for the players, the coaches and everyone in Norwegian ice hockey, who earned this place by winning promotion last year," association secretary general Petter Salsten said.

"The team have been looking forward to this for a whole year but have spent the past month in limbo."

Norway said its pre-tournament training camp and games in Canada would go ahead as

planned.

Russia's potential return to international ice hockey has prompted boycott threats ahead of next year's men's World Championship in Germany.

Austria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Latvia, Norway and Sweden have said they would refuse to face Russia. One sponsor has withdrawn, while others have said they could follow if Russia takes part.

The German Ice Hockey Federation urged the IIHF to provide clarity over the men's World Championship.

“We now need this planning security for our home World Championship in May, for the teams, the fans and all partners,” federation chairman Frank Lutz said in a statement. “We therefore demand prompt clarification from the IIHF.”

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