



NEW ZEALAND RUGBY LEAGUE PLAYER PARTICIPATION ELIGIBILITY POLICY

Updated 20/02/2026

Medical and scientific data has detailed the physical and mental risk that young players under the age of 17 face of sustaining serious and or long-term injuries as a result of competing against older and heavier players and in particular to players competing in grades more than **two** age groups above their eligible date of birth grade.

The risk factors are:

- The continuing physical and mental development of adolescent males and females from the age 5 to 17 years.
- Considerable increases of the impact forces generated and required to be absorbed by players when playing against older and heavier opposition in competition.

The NZRL (New Zealand Rugby League) has a required duty of care to take all practical steps to ensure the safety of all players participating in the sport of Rugby League. As a result of this duty of care, the NZRL has reviewed its current Player Participation Eligibility Policy and based on review recommendations received from the NZRL Medical Council have reconfirmed the following policies:

1. Minimum age to play Rugby League:

The minimum age a player can be registered is 4 years of age on or after 1 January in the year of registration. Cannot play until they have reached 4 years of age.

2. Maximum age for mixed gender full contact Rugby League.

The maximum age for males and females to play in mixed gender full contact Rugby League is 12 years of age. That being the players are to attain the age of 12 years during the year of the competition.

3. Minimum age requirements to participate in open age, open weight rugby league grades:

The player has attained or will have attained at least seventeen (17) years of age by the 31 December in the year **preceding** the commencement of the season.

- This policy shall apply equally to male and female Rugby League players.
- Exemption consideration from this policy will be treated on a case-by-case basis.

4. Maximum age that players may play above their registered age:

Players, male and female can only play above their eligible age in age restricted grades to a maximum of 2 years as at 1 January in the year of participation. For clear definition, this applies to all games, including any trials and friendly games.

The following exemption only will apply to Point 4:

- i. Players participating in open age, but restricted weight competitions will have attained at least seventeen (17) years of age by the 31 December in the year **preceding** the commencement of the season.
- ii. Players participating in an under 20-year age competition, **must attain the age of 17 years** before being eligible to participate in a 20s competition. This policy shall apply equally to male and female players.

NO DISPENSATION will be accepted or considered for any player (both male and female) to play above the 2-year policy up to U16 grade. For clarification this includes Educational Football grades.

Zones, District Leagues, Affiliates or Associates shall implement these policies within their areas of control.