

Hand-off and fend-off World Rugby & RFU Guidelines

This is not a black and white issue, except for various levels of Junior Rugby. So to help, here are guidelines we recommend you follow.

RFU Regulation 15 covers all the general Laws applicable to Mini & Junior Rugby. Specific variations applicable to all age groups are covered in Regulation 15 Appendix 1-11.

The Hand or Fend Off

- Up to Under 11 Boys & Girls
 - The ball carrier may run and dodge potential tacklers, but cannot fend or hand them off with their hand or the ball
- Under 12 & Under 13 Boys
 - The ball carrier may run and dodge potential tacklers, but must not fend or hand them off above the armpits
- Under 13 Girls
 - The ball carrier may run and dodge potential tacklers, but cannot fend or hand them off with their hand or the ball
- Under 14 up to Under 18 Boys, Under 15 up to Under 18 Girls, Men & Women Senior Rugby
 - Legal Hand / Fend Offs to all areas of the body are allowed

This ability to Hand / Fend Off is covered by World Rugby Law 9.24.

- A ball-carrier is permitted to hand-off an opponent provided excessive force is not used.

World Rugby Law 9.24 means contact may be made anywhere on the opposition player, including the face & head.

However, the accepted practice at all levels where the hand / fend off is allowed, **is that the hand must be open palm and the arm primarily bent on contact.**

Of course, any hand-off performed badly or failing to meet these criteria runs the risk of being adjudged dangerous play, which will always prevail. The object is to make contact with the tackler and then push away; the use of the base of the hand, normally associated with a straight arm, would constitute striking the opposition player and is an offence. As is so often the case, it is up to the individual referee to decide what constitutes dangerous play, if it is not otherwise specified in law.

Coaches at the lower junior age groups can be quite aggressive while insisting that hand-offs to the face are illegal. The hand-off to the face is perfectly legal for U14 Boys & U15 Girls and upwards and does not constitute dangerous play.

Even with World Rugby Law 9.24, the hand off is not defined specifically. So what is excessive force? A golden rule that may help your judgment might be: "If it looked bad, it probably was and it should be sanctioned."

A far more dangerous practice that must be penalised at every opportunity is the use of a raised forearm or elbow by the ball carrier, even when holding the ball. This aggressive fending off is unacceptable and the referee should insist that the first point of contact is the open hand.

So, as in so many situations for the referee, context and judgement are required. Referees must make clear to the players in the game what is acceptable and what is not and be consistent in their application of their interpretation of the Laws of the Game.