

ON-DECK BATTER & DUGOUT CONDUCT

The on-deck batter is defined as “the offensive player who is scheduled to bat *next*.” At the beginning of the game and at the start of the inning, the on-deck batter is the offensive player who is going to lead off that inning. Rule 1.

The on-deck circle is defined as “the area nearest their dugout in which the next batter of the offensive team is *restricted to* before the release of the pitch.” Rule 1.

“Coaches, players, substitutes, and other bench personnel shall not be outside the designated bench, dugout/team area except when the rule allows or is justified by the umpire.” Effect: “The first offense is a team warning. Any repeat offense shall result in the ejection of that team member.” Rule 5-12.

“Once the game begins, only players *involved* in the game may be outside the dugout, except when the rule allows or the reason is justified by an umpire.” Rules Supplement 16. “Players involved in the game” are limited to batters, runners, student base coaches, etc. An example of a situation “justified by an umpire” is a substitute pitcher warming up with another player. Additional offensive player warm-ups outside the dugout is *not* an exception to these explicit rules.

“The on-deck batter *shall* take a position within the lines of the on-deck circle nearest the offensive team area.” Rule 7-1-A

“The on-deck batter may leave the on-deck circle: (1) when they become the batter; (2) when directing runners advancing from third to home plate.” Rule 7-1-C-(1) & (2).

The primary reason for requiring an on-deck batter – To keep the game flowing. Requiring an on-deck batter eliminates the need for allowing the on-deck batter to take multiple warm-up swings once she gets in the batter’s box. Use of the on-deck batter is also a tool for the offensive coaching staff to confirm who is going to bat next and that this player is, in fact, ready to bat.

By rule, there can only be one on-deck batter. That is so because there can only be one “next” batter. At the start of the game and the beginning of a new half inning, only one on-deck batter is permitted. Allowing more than one offensive player to swing a bat at this time is improper, violative of the rules, and creates a significant risk of liability.

Use of an on-deck batter is *required*. The on-deck batter is *restricted to* the on-deck circle. Generally, the circle (assuming one is drawn), will be located near each team’s dugout. If as a result of safety concerns, the *umpire* deems the use of an on-deck circle on the field is potentially dangerous, the *umpire* may designate an alternative area off the field.

All coaches, players, substitutes, and bench personnel are required to be in the dugout unless another rule allows them to be outside that area (e.g., use of a 1st and 3rd base coach, on-deck batter, runners, etc.) Players and bench personnel shall not be permitted to leave the dugout in order to hit off tees, do soft toss, use a hitting stick, etc. To allow otherwise would be to violate the on-deck batter rule and the dugout conduct rule. Moreover, it would tend to defeat the purpose of requiring an on-deck batter in the first place – To keep the game moving. In addition, use of these additional warm-up techniques creates significant liability issues. Frequently, these so-called “double-deck” or “triple-deck” batters do not wear required protective gear. There is also the risk that spectators, classmates, etc. could get hit by one of the additional on-deck batters. Remember, while umpires could be liable for not enforcing clearly established and codified rules, coaches and schools are potentially even more liable than umpires. That is because coaches and schools have assumed additional responsibilities of a supervisory nature.

Strict enforcement of the on-deck batter rules by both umpires and coaches will help keep the game moving smoothly and limit potential liability.