



NEW AGE DIVISIONS: FAQ

Australia's judo community is excited by the move towards a more fun and fair environment for young competitors - but there are many good questions as a result. Here are some Frequently Asked Questions, and the answers we can provide at this time. Other questions - and answers - will come only from time and experience, and we will update as these come to light.

Please direct further questions to Maria Pekli (maria.pekli@ausjudo.com.au).

1. WHY WAS THIS NEEDED?

Judo Australia's mission is to build participation in Judo across Australia. We are also tasked with developing young athletes on a pathway to competition – and every pathway starts with your first competition.

Realigning the age groups to be more developmentally appropriate will encourage more children to try competition, and to come back for their second competition, their third, maybe States, then Nationals. It also aligns our age groups with most European nations, who offer a successful model for increasing participation, developing talent and maximising safety for pre-Cadet athletes.

Having a two-year age groups before Cadets will offer judoka a more competitive experience that is fairer, safer, and more fun.

Children who are closer in age and developmental level will generally show a more even distribution of skill levels, which can help to increase the competitiveness of matches and provide a more challenging experience. It also helps promote a sense of fairness and sportsmanship.

Children who are closer in age and skill level are also less likely to accidentally injure each other during matches, which will help to ensure that everyone has a safe and enjoyable experience.

2. WHAT ARE THE NEW AGE DIVISIONS?

Judo Australia has introduced new **U11**, **U13**, and **U15** age groups for boys and girls. (These groups span what were previously Junior Boys and Girls (U12) and Senior Boys and Girls (U15).)

New rules have been introduced for the mixed-gender **U9** age group.

All other age groups (cadet men and women, kyu grade men and women, junior men and women, senior men and women) are unchanged.

Adaptive Judo (previously No Limits) competitors will be aligned with their appropriate age groups.

3. WHAT AGE GROUP IS MY CHILD?

Judo Australia uses calendar years to determine a child's age group. All children born in a specific year are assigned to an age group as follows for **2024**:

- U9 children will be those born in 2016 and later
- U11 boys and girls will be those born in 2014 and 2015.
- U13 boys and girls will be those born in 2012 and 2013.
- U15 boys and girls will be those born in 2010 and 2011.

4. WHAT RULES WILL APPLY TO EACH AGE GROUP?

U9 and U11:

- Competition will be a Round Robin of 3 to 5 competitors.
- In exceptional circumstance best-of-three for two competitors is allowed.
- No weight classes will be observed. Children are grouped with competitors that are **closest in weight**, with a maximum of 15% weight difference across the division.
- The existing Junior Rules will be utilized, with a change to the time-limit for U11s matches. These will be reduced to 2 mins 30 secs in length (before proceeding to uncapped Golden Score if required).

U13, U15:

- These categories will use the existing U15 rules for 2024.
- In early 2024, Judo Australia will be consulting coaches and clubs as part of process to reexamine the rule set for 2025. Our intention is to move towards armbars and strangles being permitted for use in U15 competition from 2025. This would bring our U15 athletes into alignment with competitive judo in other regions, and boosts the preparedness of Australia's U15 teams for international tours.

5. WHY A 15% WEIGHT RANGE? ISN'T THAT TOO BIG?

In the U9 and U11 age groups, where no weight classes will be used, children will be grouped with their **closest weight**, with a maximum weight difference of 15%. The vast majority of matches will be between children closely matched in size – the smaller age range will mean a generally smaller weight range. The 15% figure gives tournament organisers the opportunity to include a player who might otherwise miss out on a fight if no more suitable bracket is available.

6. WILL MY CHILD STILL NEED TO WEIGH IN?

Yes, children will still have to weigh in to ensure all competitors in a division are within the 15% weight margin.

7. WHICH AGE GROUPS HAVE WEIGHT CLASSES AND WHAT ARE THEY?

Only the U9 and U11 age groups no longer have weight classes. All other age groups from U13 upwards have weight classes as outlined in the following document:

[\(Judo Australia Age and Weight Divisions\)](#)

8. MUST ALL COMPETITIONS FOLLOW THIS FORMAT?

Judo Australia recommends, but does not mandate, that all Australian competitions adopt this approach to age groups. The goal is to increase participation at events big and small – and this will be most effective with a consistent approach across all levels of competition.

These divisions and rules will be compulsory for events in the **National Events Series**: the Canberra International Open, the Sydney International Open, Melbourne International Open, the National Championships, the Brisbane International Open, and the Adelaide International Open, Perth International Open. Competitions run by the state organisations, and local clubs, have the freedom to nominate their own rule sets, but Judo Australia strongly encourages organisers to adopt this new framework.

9. HAVE THESE DIVISIONS BEEN DESIGNED TO AVOID WEIGHT CUTTING?

No. These divisions have been designed to make competition more attractive to young judoka who might otherwise be apprehensive about competing. **Judo Australia does not recommend, encourage or support weight cutting for children.**

Previously flexibility had been built into registration processes to allow children to compete in another division if they didn't make weight; this will now be unnecessary for U9 and U11 players. Players in the U13 and 15 age groups will be given the opportunity to fight in the next weight division if they do not make weight.

10. HOW WILL THIS IMPACT PLAYER NUMBERS? AREN'T THE DIVISIONS TOO SMALL ALREADY?

These changes are designed to entice more players into competition, with the long term goal of increasing player numbers.

Judo programs around the world have demonstrated the opportunity to engage with developmentally-closer players will encourage children to persist with judo in the earliest stages, to make the move to competition, and to continue competing as they mature. The first step is offering developmentally appropriate opportunities in a safe and controlled manner.

During the transition to the new age groups, some divisions may have fewer numbers as a result of the narrowed divisions. This problem stems from a wider challenge to attract and retain children – particularly girls – to judo. Only by addressing this problem will competitions in Australia become sustainable, and this is a necessary step towards that goal.

As has always happened, individual cases will be taken into account and solutions found to ensure each player gets the opportunity to test themselves in competition.