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Pitching Rules: What the Rulebooks Actually Say

Hands apart on the rubber, ball in the glove or the hand, and no "presenting" the ball. Here is the exact rule from every major girls' fastpitch organization in the U.S.

1

Hands start apart

Every organization requires the pitcher to step on the rubber and take the signal with her hands *separated*.

2

Glove or bare hand

The ball may be held in the glove *or* the throwing hand. No rulebook requires it to be in one specific hand.

3

No "presentation"

No rulebook uses the word "present" or says the pitcher must show the ball to the batter.

One honest detail: in every rulebook the hands do have to **come together** before the pitch starts. The difference is timing. **USSSA, NCS, NSA and NCAA** set only a maximum (the hands may just touch, and USSSA says they "may be motionless or moving"). **USA Softball, NFHS (high school) and FASA** say the hands stay together for **at least one second**, and PGF, Triple Crown, Alliance and USFA play NFHS rules, so the one-second rule carries over to them. None of them require a full stop to "present" the ball.

At a glance

Organization	Rulebook used	Rule #	Hands apart to start	Glove or hand	Hands together before pitch
USSSA	USSSA Fastpitch Rule Book, 18th Ed. (Dec 2025)	6.1.A–D	**Required**	**Yes**	**No minimum, up to 10 sec; hands may be moving**
NCS	NCS National Fastpitch Rules (current)	9.2, 9.3	**Required**	**Yes**	**No minimum, up to 5 sec**
NSA	NSA Fast Pitch Rule Book 2025	Rule 6, Sec. 1 b–d	**Required**	**Yes**	**No minimum, up to 10 sec**
USA Softball	Official Rules of Softball 2026	6A.1.A, D, E	**Required**	**Yes**	**At least 1 sec, up to 10**
NFHS (High School)	NFHS Softball Rules Book	6-1-1 a–c	**Required**	**Yes***	**At least 1 sec, up to 10**
PGF	NFHS rules (2026–27 season)	NFHS 6-1-1	**Required**	**Yes***	**At least 1 sec (NFHS)**
Triple Crown	NFHS rules with modifications	NFHS 6-1-1	**Required**	**Yes***	**At least 1 sec (NFHS)**
Alliance	NFHS rules with modifications	NFHS 6-1-1	**Required**	**Yes***	**At least 1 sec (NFHS)**
USFA	USFA Rulebook 2026–2027 (uses NFHS pitching)	USFA 6.1, 6.2; NFHS 6-1-1	**Required**	**Yes***	**At least 1 sec (NFHS)**
FASA	FASA Rule Book, 8th Ed. (eff. 1/21/2024)	3.1–3.3	**Required**	**Yes**	**1 to 10 sec before delivery starts**
NCAA (college)	NCAA Softball Rules	10.2.2, 10.18	**Required**	**Yes**	**No minimum, up to 5 sec**

Green = matches "hands apart, glove or hand, no pause" exactly. **Amber** = hands apart and glove or hand are the same, but hands stay together at least one second (still no "presentation"). Umpires enforce the rulebook of the event you are playing in, so check your tournament's posted rules. *NFHS's own rule-differences chart lists its signal rule as "same as USA Softball," whose rule says the ball stays "in either the glove or pitching hand."

The exact rules, word for word

Quoted from each organization's current published rulebook. Rule numbers and links are included so you can check them yourself or show an umpire.

USSSA Fastpitch

No minimum

Fastpitch Rule Book & By-Laws, 18th Edition (printed Dec 2025)

Rule 6.1.A

> "Prior to the pitch, the pitcher shall take a position with their pivot foot in contact with the pitcher's plate and their non-pivot foot in contact with or behind the pitcher's plate. Both feet must be on the ground within or partially within the 24-inch length of the pitcher's plate. The hands must be apart."

Rule 6.1.B

> "Preliminary to pitching, the pitcher must take a position with the ball in the glove or pitching hand, with the hands separated."

Rule 6.1.C – 6.1.D

> "While in this position, the pitcher shall take (or simulate taking) a signal from the catcher." ... "After completing 'C' above, the pitcher shall bring the hands together in front of the body for not more than 10 seconds before releasing the ball. The hands may be motionless or moving."

Source: dev-newsfeed.usssa.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/usssa-fastpitch-rulebook-edition-18.pdf

NCS (National Championship Sports)

No minimum

NCS National Fastpitch Rules, Section 9 Pitching (current online edition)

Rule 9.2 (1)(a)

> "The pitcher is considered in the pitching position when she has her hands apart, her pivot foot in contact with the pitcher's plate, both feet on the ground within the 24-inch length of the pitcher's plate, the hips in line with first and third bases and the catcher is in the position to receive the pitch."

Rule 9.2 (1)(b) and (e)

> "The ball must be held and remain in one hand, either gloved or bare." ... "the pitcher's hands must come together in view of the home plate umpire for not more than five (5) seconds."

Rule 9.3

> "The pitch officially begins and cannot be discontinued once the hands have separated after coming together."

Source: playncs.com/fastpitch/Rules/Details/2/national-fastpitch-rules

NSA (National Softball Association)

No minimum

2025 NSA Fast Pitch Rule Book

Rule 6, Section 1 (b)–(d)

> "Both feet must be on the ground and within the 24" pitching plate, hips aligned with first and third base, with the hands separated and the ball being held in either the glove or pitching hand." ... "While in this position, the pitcher shall take, or simulate taking, a signal from the catcher." ... "The pitcher shall bring the hands together or touch them together for no more than ten seconds."

Source: playnsa.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/2025-Fast-Pitch-Rule-Book-P.pdf

USA Softball

1-second minimum

2026 Official Rules of Softball, Rule 6A (Fast Pitch)

Rule 6A, Section 1.A

> "When taking the pitching position in contact with the pitcher's plate, the pitcher must have their hands separated and must have the ball in either the glove or the pitching hand."

Rule 6A, Section 1.D

> "While in contact with the pitcher's plate, the pitcher shall take a signal or appear to take a signal with the hands separated. The ball must remain in either the glove or pitching hand."

Rule 6A, Section 1.E

> "The pitcher shall bring the hands together for not less than one second and not more than 10 seconds before releasing the ball..."

What this means: hands apart and glove-or-hand are written word for word. The hands must stay together at least one second, but the rule never says the ball must be "presented" or shown to the batter.

Source: usasoftball.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/120/2026/01/1-12-2026-Rule-Book.pdf

NFHS (High School)

1-second minimum

NFHS Softball Rules Book, Rule 6-1-1

Rule 6-1-1 (a)–(c)

> The pitcher takes the pitching position "with the hands separated." "While in this position, the pitcher shall take (or simulate taking) a signal from the catcher." "After completing 'b' above, the pitcher shall bring the hands together in front of the body for not less than one second and not more than 10 seconds before releasing the ball."

Note: NFHS's own 2025 rule-differences chart lists its signal rule (6-1-1b) and hands-together timing (6-1-1c) as "Same as USA Softball." The 2027 NFHS rule changes (July 2026) did not change this rule.

Sources: assets.nfhs.org/umbraco/media/1019874/2024-rule-differences.pdf · nfhs.org/sports/softball/rules

PGF (Premier Girls Fastpitch)

Follows NFHS

PGF Rules & Regulations, 2026–27 season

> "PGF operates under the rules and guidelines set forth by National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS)." ... "All PGF tournaments and events will be played using NFHS rules with the following exceptions."

What this means: the pitching start is NFHS Rule 6-1-1 above. None of PGF's listed exceptions change the hands-apart or hands-together rule.

Source: premiergirlsfastpitch.com/home.php?layout=926495

Triple Crown Sports

Follows NFHS

Triple Crown Fastpitch tournament rules

> "Triple Crown will be using National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Softball rules with a few modifications..." Pitching modification: "While the pitcher takes the signal, her stride foot may be on or behind the pitcher's plate as far back as desired... In addition, the pitcher must take or appear to take a signal while in the pitching and signal-taking positions."

What this means: Triple Crown's only pitching change is about the stride foot. Hands follow NFHS 6-1-1.

Source: triplecrownfastpitch.com/colorado-rules

The Alliance Fastpitch

Follows NFHS

2025 Alliance National Events: Modifications and Additions to NFHS Playing Rules

> Alliance national events are played under NFHS playing rules, with Alliance's published "Modifications and Additions to NFHS playing rules."

What this means: the pitching start is NFHS Rule 6-1-1. (The Alliance modifications document was not publicly downloadable when this guide was made, so check your event's posted rules for any pitching changes.)

Source: thealliancefastpitch.com (2025 Modifications to NFHS Rules)

USFA (United States Fastpitch Association)

Follows NFHS

USFA 2026–2027 Rulebook

Sections 4.1 and 6.1

> "USFA utilizes NFHS Softball Rules (nfhs.org) for anything not specifically addressed." ... "USFA utilizes NFHS pitching rules."

Section 6.2

> "As a point of emphasis if the pitcher takes the signal off the pitchers' plate once they step on the plate they must simulate (pause) taking a signal from the catcher."

Heads-up: USFA's "pause" is for taking the signal on the rubber, which happens while the hands are still apart. It is not a requirement to present the ball.

Source: usfastpitch.com/rulebook (USFA 2026-2027 Rulebook PDF)

FASA (Fastpitch America Softball Association)

1-second minimum

FASA Rule Book, Eighth Edition, effective Jan 21, 2024

Rule 3.1

> "Before pitching, the pitcher must: have possession of the ball in the pitching or glove hand; have both hands separated as she steps onto the rubber; have the pivot foot in contact with the rubber; take or simulate taking signs while on the rubber from the catcher only..."

Rules 3.2 – 3.3

> "The pitch begins when the hands are no longer separated." ... "The delivery must start no less than 1 second and no more than 10 seconds after the hands are together."

Source: playfasa.com/rules/rulebook

NCAA (College, for reference)

No minimum

NCAA Softball Rules (as summarized in the 2025 NFHS/USA/NCAA differences chart)

Rules 10.1.1, 10.2.2, 10.18

> "The pitcher is considered to be in the pitching position when she has her hands apart..." "While in this position, the pitcher must take or appear to take a signal while on the pitching plate." "Pitcher has not more than five seconds to deliver the pitch after the hands are brought together."

Source: assets.nfhs.org/umbraco/media/1019874/2024-rule-differences.pdf