

Texas Hold 'Em Poker rules

We play no limit Texas Hold 'Em (or Texas Holdem), the version of poker played in many casinos and seen on the Travel Channel's World Poker Tour and Bravo's Celebrity Poker. These are the basic rules for Texas Hold 'Em poker (slightly customized for our game):

Getting started

To keep the game moving along, we use two standard 52-card decks. The dealer of any given game shuffles one deck and offers the player to the right an opportunity to "cut" the deck (splitting a shuffled deck in two, and moving the bottom half to the top). The player to the dealer's left has the other deck of cards, shuffling in anticipation of his or her deal next turn.

The two players left of the dealer put in the "blinds," minimum bets that ensure there is always a pot to play for. The player immediately left of the dealer puts in the amount of chips equal to the "small blind," which is half of the "big blind" amount put in by the player left of the small blind. To see the amounts of our blinds, and when those blinds increase, return to the main poker page.

The dealer passes out two cards to each player face down, dealing one card at a time starting with the player to the left of the dealer. These are known as the "hole cards."

First round of betting

Once the hole cards have been dealt, a round of betting takes place, beginning with the player to the left of the two who posted the blinds. Players can call, raise, or fold when it's their turn to bet. To call typically means matching the amount of the big blind. For example, if the big blind is 20, all other players would need to put in at least 20 total to continue playing (the small blind would only need to put in 10 to reach that total). However, if anyone decides to raise and put in more money than the big blind, all other players would have to call that new, higher total to remain in the game. AT ALL TIMES, the minimum amount that can be raised is the amount of the big blind.

Seeing the Flop

After the first betting round, and assuming more than one player remains in the game, the dealer discards the top card of the deck. This is called burning the card and is done to ensure that no one accidentally saw the top card, and to help prevent cheating.

The dealer then flips the next three cards face up on the table. These cards are called the "flop," and are the first cards that will make up the "community cards." All players try to make the best hand possible using any five-card combination of the community cards and their own hole cards.

After the flop, another round of betting takes place, beginning with the player to the left of the dealer. During this and all future rounds of betting, players can check, call, raise, or fold when it's their turn to bet. Players can choose the option to check when they

don't need to put in any additional money to call, and typically do so by tapping the table and saying "I check."

The Turn

Assuming more than one player remains in the game, the dealer burns another card and plays one more face up onto the table. This, the fourth community card, is called the "Turn."

The player to the left of the dealer begins the third round of betting.

The River

Assuming more than one player remains in the game, the dealer burns another card before placing the final face-up card on the table. This card is called the "River," and completes the community cards

Final round of betting

Players can now use any combination of seven cards -- the five community cards and the two hole cards known only to them -- to form the best possible five-card Poker hand.

The fourth and final round of betting starts with the player to the left of the dealer.

After the final betting round, all players who remain in the game reveal their hands. The player who made the initial bet or the player who made the last raise shows their hand first.

The player with the best hand wins.

What it means to go "All in" (and side pots)

In any round of betting, a player can choose to go "All in" on his or her turn. This means that the player is betting all chips on the outcome of that hand. As always, other players can choose to match that player's bet. If only one player calls another individual's all-in, the hole cards for both players can be turned over immediately, and play can continue rapidly with no further raises being possible. If more than one player calls the all-in, hole cards should remain face down until the end of the game. Because multiple players are involved (and assuming they have unequal number of chips), the two players who have excess chips beyond the amount raised in the all-in can further raise each other. It is this situation that creates "side pots."

An example of how this could happen: Three players are still in a hand: Bob, Chris, and Brooke. Bob has 800 in chips that he hasn't yet bet, Chris has 1200 left, and Brooke has 1600. Bob decides to go all-in, betting his remaining 800. Chris is left of Bob and decides to call the 800, and raise Brooke a further 200.

At this point, Bob's 800 and Chris' 800 are put in a separate pile with all previous bets: that is as much as Bob can win, as he can't match any further raises on the part of Brooke and Chris. The extra 200 becomes a side pot. Brooke can either match the full

1000 (800 going to the pile that Bob can possibly win, and 200 to the side pot) or fold and lose out on all of it. She decides to call Chris' raise, and adds 200 to the side pot.

As the final round plays out, Bob's hand ends up beating both Brooke's and Chris'. He takes the portion of the pot that he was eligible to win (everything but the side pot). Chris and Brooke then compare their hands to see who wins the extra side pot, since Bob isn't able to take it.

If either Chris or Brooke had a better hand than Bob in that situation, then he or she would have taken all of the money including the side pot, since both of them were able to call the raises that went beyond Bob's all-in.