

memo

DATE: March 16, 2020
TO: WIC Local Agencies
FROM: State WIC Staff
SUBJECT: WIC Guidance in Responding to COVID-19 **Follow up**

[WIC Guidance in Responding to COVID-19](#) was sent to local WIC agencies on March 13, 2020. This memo offers additional guidance, clarification and answers to common questions we are hearing from Local Agencies.

Currently, federal guidance requires that we continue to meet federal regulations. Local agencies can continue to operate as usual. However, there are flexibilities within WIC regulations concerning physical presence and certification periods. Federal guidance and instructions are evolving rapidly so the following information may change in the coming days. ***The State Agency will offer conference calls on WIC services and COVID19 on the following dates: Wednesday, 3/18, 3/25, 4/8, and 4/15 from 8:30-9:30. Use the following conference call line: 1-855-282-6330 Refer to the emailed version of this memo for the Access Code or contact your state Consultant.***

Clinic Closures: If you are advised to close WIC clinic by local leadership, please notify your State WIC Consultant by email. Include the following information in your email: justification for closing clinic, identify if services are being moved to a different location, indicate if services are being provided remotely and how this is being communicated with participants.

Physical presence - Participants can attend clinic if they are well and if the WIC clinic is open. Physical presence can be waived for COVID-19. Select the physical presence exception as “Contagious disease” in drop down or document COVID-19 as the physical presence exception in notes. **Coming soon to HuBERT – Note Subject: COVID-19.** All appointments may be completed by phone, with follow up as necessary.

Certifications (New and Recertification): Can be completed by phone

- **Required activities** – Verify Income, Residency and Identity. The Pending and Presumptive Eligibility policies and procedures continue as present. Presumptive eligibility may only be used if WIC Staff verify earned income. If that is not available at the time of a phone cert, complete all other parts of the certification and add benefits after verifying earned income.
 - Adjunctive eligibility verification – Use phone or on-line MA verification for Income, Residency and Identity if applicable. The Immunization Registry (MIIC) may also be used for Residency and Identity verification.
 - Participants may send verifications via mail, email or text (Release of Information for email or text is not required when the participant initiates the communication. [MOM, Section 1.7](#))

- Recertification – the participant may verify Identity by mailing, emailing or texting a picture of the WIC Card or verbally reporting the number of the WIC Card. “Known to staff” may also be documented for Identity.
- **Height/Length, Weight and Hemoglobin** – can be deferred for up to 90 days. Participants may obtain measurements from their health care provider or send a screen shot of the measurements from an electronic medical record. Do not enter or use self-reported data.
- **Height/Length and Weight** – If anthropometric measurements are not available, from either an in person visit, medical provider, or electronic medical record, select “Unknown Height/Weight” in the Information System and collect at next visit (document in note reason not collected). Do not document self-reported height and weight in the Information System.
- **Hemoglobin** – If hemoglobin data is not available, from a medical provider, or electronic medical record, defer for 90 days. Do not document self-reported hemoglobin in the Information System. **Coming soon to HuBERT- Bloodwork Reason Not Collected Drop-Down: COVID-19.**
- **Rights and Responsibilities** – Verbally explain the Rights and Responsibilities. Refer the participant to the Rights and Responsibilities on our website or on the My Minnesota WIC App. Once the participant has been able to review the Rights and Responsibilities, the CPA should document the participant signature as “Phone Cert” with CPA initials.
- **Release of Information** – Determine if a Release of Information is necessary at this time. If so, mail a copy of your Release of Information to the participant with a stamped, self-addressed envelope OR email a copy for the participant to sign and return.
- **Medical Formula** – Current policy and procedures apply, [MOM, Section 7.6](#). To expedite the process, the local agency may obtain verbal verification from the health care provider, and written medical documentation must be obtained within one month.
- **Nutrition Education** – Continue to provide nutrition education as staff time allows. Make participants aware of the nutrition education materials available on the MN WIC website and My Minnesota WIC app.
- **Breastfeeding Education** - Many breastfeeding videos are available on the MN WIC website. Active links to videos are also available through the Breastfeeding Cards on the My Minnesota WIC App.
- **Referrals** – Check with your local resources and update your contacts as needed, particularly for feeding sites, school meals, and food shelves.
- **WIC Cards for new participants** – can be mailed, or offer a “drive up” option. If unable to obtain signature for the new card, document the reason with CPA initials in the signature box.
- **Securing WIC Cards:** Ideally, WIC Cards should be secured at the WIC clinic location and mailed from that location by WIC Staff. If all WIC Staff are working off-site, designate one or two key staff to secure cards in their work location(s). All requests for mailing new cards should be sent to those key staff.

Midcertifications: May be completed by phone. Follow the anthropometric and hemoglobin measurement guidance as outlined for certifications. If not able to complete, a midcertification may be postponed and provide nutrition education over the phone, issue 3 months of benefits.

Nutrition Education contacts: Phone contacts and use of wichealth.org is encouraged. See the [Education Choice](#) page for additional resources and information.

High Risk Contacts: Phone contacts are encouraged. If the participant is high risk due to height/weight or hemoglobin concerns, obtain the measurements from the health care provider or electronic medical record OR waive the measurements.

Separation of Duties: Current policy and procedures are applicable.

Telework requirements: WIC information that displays on your screen is private. Make sure your workspace setup supports data privacy. Do not use an open network (the network must have a password). VPN access is preferable since it provides secure remote access.

For more information about security of the WIC information system and data privacy, please refer to [MOM, Section 9.3](#) and [MOM, Section 1.7](#).

Food and Formula Supply: We are in communication with Abbott and the formula shortages on the shelves. This is currently not a supply issue but rather a stocking issue. Most chain and independent grocers have informed us that they are stocking shelves nightly. Discussions have occurred with larger chains to limit purchases, but at the discretion of the store.

- Some suggestions for participants shopping during this uncertain time.
- Shop early in the benefit cycle. Foods cannot be replaced for any reason.
- Go early in the morning or call ahead to stores to find when they will stock the shelves next for items needed.
- Keep in mind some food groups have multiple options to pick from (whole grains, peanut butter and beans).
- Tell the manager of the store that you are using WIC. It is possible they have food/cans in the back.
- Give WIC clients food shelf and contact information to locations that may have formula.

A quote from a large chain, "we are working on getting the product to the stores as fast as we can. I suspect by the end of the week, the stores should have better inventory levels, however, all is dependent on demand and the panic buying we have been experiencing."

Funding: During this time of extreme uncertainty, we know that WIC Local Agencies are concerned about caseload and whether participation levels will go up or down in response to COVID-19. The state agency is planning to continue level funding for agencies during this time even if caseload declines. We will work with you to ensure that your WIC funding levels stay as stable as possible.

WIC Calendar: Is being updated as we become aware of changes/cancellations.

App Message: WIC participants will receive the following message in the next day:

Title: WIC Services Update

Message: The Minnesota WIC Program continues to operate during the response to COVID-19. Please call your [local WIC agency](#) if you have questions.

We appreciate your flexibility and patience as we move through these uncertain times.