

SECTION: Certification**SUBJECT: WIC Program Orientation**

Federal Regulations: WIC Policy Memo: WIC Program Explanation

POLICY

Each participant shall be explained the general purpose and scope of the WIC program. It is paramount that this information be conveyed in an accessible way for applicants and participants to understand:

- The value of WIC Program participation,
- The Connecticut WIC Program Participant Rights and Responsibilities
- A detailed overview of the Food Delivery system, including a review of the WIC Approved Food Guide, the Family Benefits List (FBL) and use of WIC food benefits, and a clear description of actions that result in suspension or disqualification from the WIC Program.

Refer to the Connecticut WIC Program website www.ct.gov/dph/wic for ways to reinforce consistent messages about WIC nutrition services.

See below for a general overview of what to include in a WIC program orientation, whether conducted individually or in a group setting this provides staff with talking points, in a conversational manner, on the various components of the WIC Program.

Purpose of WIC: The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children has a long history of providing nutritional support to families. You or your family member(s) are eligible for WIC if you meet all the following criteria or factors:

- You are who you say you are. (Identity)
- You live in Connecticut. (Residency)
- You meet our income guidelines (Income)
- You are either, a Woman (pregnant, breastfeeding or postpartum), Infant or Child up to age 5. (Category)
- And most importantly, you complete a nutrition assessment with our nutrition staff (Nutritional Need)

As a WIC participant you can expect WIC staff to provide you with quality nutrition services:

- The first time you or your family member apply for WIC, you will speak with a nutritionist about you or your child's eating and physical activity habits, growth or weight gain/loss, bloodwork results and health or medical history or concerns. This is what we, at WIC, call a "complete nutrition assessment".
- Based on your conversation with the WIC nutrition staff, they will identify any nutrition or diet related concerns and then tailor information for you and your baby's or child's specific needs

and interests. WIC nutrition staff will work with you to develop a plan to reach your nutrition and physical activity goals.

- If you are a parent-to-be, we will ask you about how you plan to feed your baby. Research shows that breastfed infants are sick less often and have a reduced risk of becoming overweight or obese. If you are interested in learning more about breastfeeding, make sure to ask your nutritionist. *As you may already know, breastfeeding is recommended by WIC and national professional health and governmental organizations- for example, the American Academy of Pediatrics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), World Health Organization (WHO).* If you think breastfeeding isn't for you, we respect your decision. It is our job at WIC to provide you with the facts, to help you make the choice that is right for you and your new baby. We also stress the importance of obtaining health care and encourage parents/guardians to keep their children's immunizations up to date. Just to note, breastfeeding is a great way to *protect* your new baby from getting sick. Breastmilk is a baby's first immunization.
- At WIC we are required to ask you questions about certain lifestyle behaviors such as smoking, nicotine, or tobacco use and alcohol and substance use i.e., cannabis. We need to ask these questions to make sure that we provide you with the correct information on staying healthy, delivering a healthy baby or caring for your children. We are here to help you, not judge you and your lifestyle decisions. If you want more information on quitting smoking, alcohol or substances please let us know and we can connect you with programs to assist you.
- While we are on the topic of referrals, we also know that it takes quite a bit of resources to raise a family. Another great part of the WIC Program is we can let you know about additional resources that you may want to improve your family's health. We can make referrals to a pediatrician if you don't have one or give you a list of dentists in the area, as well as give your information on SNAP or local food pantries if you are concerned with having enough food in your home. Some common referrals are listed in the selected referrals brochure. Just remember, if you have questions, please ask a WIC staff person for more information.
- WIC provides each participant with a specific package of supplemental foods. The WIC food packages reflect the recommendations in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans that are based on current research. WIC offers milk, eggs, beans or peanut butter, whole grain cereals, brown rice, 100% whole wheat or multigrain breads or whole-wheat tortillas in certain amounts that are right for you and/or your children. WIC also provides cash value benefits for fresh, frozen or canned fruits and vegetables.
- The Nutritionist will review your Family Benefit List (FBL) with you. Your Family Benefit List or FBL includes the dates in which you can use your benefits as well quantities and foods issued on your eWIC card. WIC benefits are valid for 30 days and if unused do not roll over into the next month. It's important to purchase all your WIC foods before midnight of the last day to use your benefits. If you receive SNAP or TFA, remember to swipe your eWIC card first so all WIC approved foods are paid for by WIC and does not come out of your other benefits. We are happy to work with you to adjust your WIC foods to meet individual family members' needs. Please ask a WIC staff person if you have questions about your WIC foods or WIC benefits. (Local agencies can choose to review frequency of benefit issuance and how to get

families on a single visit cycle. See [WIC 400-01 through 400-05](#) and [WIC 300-02 Food Package Tailoring](#).)

- Today you were issued an eWIC card. Before you can start shopping you must activate your card by calling the customer service number on the back of your card or go to www.connectebt.com. You will be asked to enter your date of birth, zip code and 16-digit eWIC card number. Once you enter this information you will be asked to select a PIN. Select a PIN that is easy to remember. For safety purposes do not write your PIN on your card. If you have any questions related to your card review the eWIC card brochure. Once you have pinned your card you can start shopping.
- Now let's spend a few minutes discussing some tips on how to shop for WIC foods. Today you will receive a vendor list which includes a list of grocery stores in your area that accept WIC. Please note that you can only purchase special formula from pharmacies. You can also access an updated vendor list on the WICShopper app. You will also receive a WIC Approved Food Guide today. It's important to read through the food guide before you start shopping so you are aware of what sizes, brands and types of foods you can purchase with WIC. For example, WIC has a long list of WIC approved cereals but you must pay attention to size and types. WIC cereals must be 12 oz or larger. If you have a total of 36 oz of cereal on your Family Benefit List you can buy two-18 oz packages, three-12 oz or one-15oz and one-21 oz container. It's important to pay attention to packaging at the store. Review the Buy Only and Do Not Buy sections of the Food Guide for specifics on what is WIC allowable. Shopping with WIC may seem overwhelming at first.
- We have several resources to help make your shopping experience better. You'll find a series of tips to help you have a positive shopping experience in the front and back of the food guide as well as a series of short shopping videos with helpful topics including how to check your balance, choosing WIC approved foods and using the WICShopper app.
- The WICShopper app is a free resource that many of our families use. On the app you can identify if a food item is WIC approved, view a list of your current month's benefits, future appointments including day/time/location and what is needed, WIC stores, a link to the shopping videos, and the Approved Food Guide. To download the app, go to your App Store and search for WICShopper.

So, that covers what we at WIC have to offer to you and your family. Now let's talk about what we expect from you, once you become our WIC participant. Let's review the WIC Program rules and clarify what it means to "abuse" WIC Program Benefits. If you haven't already, you'll be asked to sign the WIC Rights and Responsibilities Form to participate in the program. Make sure you read it carefully. If you need help, let a WIC staff person know and we can explain what the Rights and Responsibilities mean to you. Some highlights that we'd like to discuss with you now are:

Your Rights

- Since WIC is a federally (US government) funded program, the information collected on you, or your child may be used to evaluate how WIC is working. We may also share information you provide us with other programs or organizations to coordinate health care services for you and your family for example, provide you with referrals. WIC staff will not share your name or address with anyone outside of the WIC Program without your special permission. By signing the Rights and Responsibilities today, you agree to let us share your information for most mandatory and targeted referrals. By signing the Applicant/Participant Authorization form, you are allowing WIC to share information with you, or your child's health care provider and any organization listed on the form to better coordinate your care. If we refer you to an organization that will contact you directly, such as the dental program and/or Early Intervention Program, we may ask you to sign another release for this referral, to verify that WIC has your permission to give your contact information to this referral program. ([See WIC 200-12 Certification Forms](#))
- WIC is an equal opportunity employer and provider. Eligibility rules to participate in WIC are the same for everyone, regardless of race, color, gender, disability or national origin. You may appeal any decisions made by the local agency regarding your eligibility for the WIC Program. If you'd like more information on appealing a decision (asking why you weren't eligible for WIC today) please ask a local agency staff member or use the information on the Notice of Participant Action Form (have forms available). ([See WIC 104-03 Discrimination Complaints](#))
- Part of our job at WIC is to make health services and nutrition education available to you and your eligible family members. You are encouraged to participate in these services to get the most of what WIC has to offer.

Your Responsibilities

- As a reminder you will be given a **WIC Approved Food Guide** before you leave today. The WIC Approved Food Guide provides you with information about WIC foods you can buy with WIC benefits. You and your child's benefit amounts may differ based on your category or age. Use the food guide and your family benefits to make your shopping list. If you have questions while you are at the store, go to customer service. If you have a problem purchasing an item that you believe is or should be WIC approved ask for a store manager. If you need additional assistance while at the store you can call the State WIC number (found in the back of your food guide) or call our office so we can try and assist you. We have information about WIC Shopper and WIC Shopping on our website.
- The food provided by the WIC program is *supplemental* and not intended to meet all your or your child's daily food requirements. We'd like to make sure you are clear about what WIC can provide. Some of our participants get upset that WIC cannot provide more food to them if they run out of WIC foods during the month; and we don't like to have our participants upset. But we must operate within our guidelines. If you are having difficulty making ends meet, please ask a nutrition staff person for our resources list or for assistance with applying for SNAP benefits or a referral to a food pantry.

Other information that may be helpful to include in a WIC Orientation:

Italicized bullets that follow are also summarized in participant handout: Questions You May Have about WIC Food Benefits

- *Also important to remember, WIC food benefits are intended for the person that is eligible for the program. The food package is based on nutrition assessment and helps support the growth and development of the person.*
- *Take care of your eWIC card. Your benefits are loaded on your eWIC card. If you lose your eWIC card, you must contact the local agency. (See [WIC 400-08](#))*
- **If you do not come to a scheduled recertification appointment your program benefits may end and you will need to reapply.**
- We have flexible appointment options, in-person, virtual, phone or online. It is important to keep your WIC appointments and be on time for both in-person and remote visits. We know raising a family can be hectic, and we also understand that sometimes changes need to be made. After this initial in-person appointment, we have more flexibility for follow-up appointments, for example, some visits can be done virtually, over the phone, or online.
- If you can't make your appointment or will be late, please call to let us know so we can help another family during that time. We make efforts to respect your time by starting groups on time, calling you for follow-up phone appointments between 10-15 minutes before/after the scheduled time.
- If you do walk-in either late or on a different day, we will do our best to fit you in the schedule. However, because we see many families here at WIC, we can't promise that you will be seen right away. The staff person that checks you in should let you know about how long the wait will be. If they don't give you time, please ask for an estimated wait time.
- We are required to tell you that it is illegal to participate in more than one WIC program at the same time. This means that you cannot receive benefits at two local WIC programs at the same time. If you do, and that information is discovered, you may be terminated from the program and be responsible for repaying any program benefits that you obtained improperly. ([See WIC 104-04 for next three bullets](#))
- If you provide WIC staff with incorrect or misleading information to become eligible for the program and it is brought to our attention, you will be suspended from the program for a period of up to 3 months. You will also be responsible for repaying any program benefits that you obtained improperly. For example, forging a doctor's signature on a WIC form or under-reporting your income would count as false information.
- *For those of you that are familiar with internet sale sites, please note that it is **against WIC Program rules and Federal law** to offer for sale, trade or donation or the actual sale, trade or donation of WIC food benefits over the internet or in person.*

To protect you from misunderstandings that may result in a mandatory suspension or disqualification we must review these rules.

When a WIC participant is found offering for sale or actually selling WIC foods on-line or in person, a Special Investigator from the State office contacts them to find out more information. The Special Investigator will ask for sales receipts for the food or formula purchased to prove that it was not bought with WIC benefits. If it is determined that WIC foods or formula were offered for sale or were sold, that person is required to serve a mandatory three (3) month suspension from the program and is required to pay the Program back for any benefits improperly used or issued.

For example, if you were found selling WIC formula, your baby would not receive WIC supplemental foods for three months. You would also be required to pay WIC back for the value of the formula that was sold.

If you have excess WIC foods or difficulty using the WIC food you've been issued, please ask a WIC Nutritionist for assistance in adjusting your WIC food packages. (See [WIC 300-02 Food Package Tailoring](#))

- Waiting Lists: At times, the WIC Program may not receive enough funding to serve all eligible people. If this happens, WIC will provide you with notice of being placed on a "waiting list". (If the local agency is not serving all priorities, staff can review which participant categories are wait listed) (See [WIC 200-30 Waiting Lists](#))

These key concepts can be conveyed in a variety of ways and can be discussed by different WIC staff i.e., program assistants, nutrition aides and nutritionists however, WIC eligibility should not be "assumed" or "conferred" until a participant is seen by a Competent Professional Authority (CPA) to reinforce the necessary component of nutrition assessment in the certification process.