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The Purpose and History of WIC

The United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, commonly known as the WIC program, serves to safeguard the health of low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, and postpartum women, infants, and children up to age 5 who are found to be at nutritional risk. As the third largest food and nutrition assistance program (nearly $6.2 billion in fiscal year 2015), WIC served about 8 million participants per month in fiscal year 2015, including over half of all infants born in the United States.

Established as a pilot program in 1972 and made permanent in 1974, USDA provides federal grants to states for WIC foods, nutrition education, breastfeeding promotion and support, and administrative costs. The WIC program is administered nationally by USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), and is administered at the local level by 90 WIC State agencies covering all 50 States, the District of Columbia, 34 Indian Tribal Organizations, American Samoa, Guam, Commonwealth Islands of the Northern Marianas, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Formerly known as the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children, WIC's name was changed under the Healthy Meals for Healthy Americans Act of 1994, in order to emphasize its role as a nutrition program.

References: https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/wic-program/

Contract Reauthorization Update

Effective September 30, 2017, the existing contract for WIC authorized retailers in the Virginia WIC Program will expire. In order for stores to continue to accept WIC for the new contract period (October 1, 2017 through September 30, 2020), all authorized retailers must receive Contract Reauthorization Training and have a signed and approved Retailer Agreement for the new contract period.

Starting in April 2017, the State WIC Office offered multiple training sessions for independent stores and corporate "multi-stores" without certified trainers, to satisfy the training requirement. In June 2017, webinars were held for the Certified Trainers of corporate "multi-stores" so that they were prepared to train their personnel and satisfy the training requirement before the August 16, 2017 deadline. A final training session will be scheduled in September 2017 to ensure that all existing WIC Authorized Retailers that want to continue to accept WIC starting October 1, 2017 have at least one manager who attended the required training.

All stores or their corporate contacts have been sent a copy of the mandatory Retailer Agreement. This form must be completed, signed and returned to the State WIC Office either directly or through their corporate contact. This agreement will be reviewed for completeness, signed and returned to serve as the store's authorization to operate as a WIC retailer starting in October 2017.

IMPORTANT: Stores who have not completed the training and submitted the mandatory forms cannot continue to accept WIC transactions after September 30, 2017. If you have questions regarding your WIC authorization status please contact immediately either your corporate headquarters or WIC Vendor Liaison.

What's New?

There have been several important updates to the Virginia WIC Program that hopefully you have noticed over the last year:

- The Virginia WIC Program developed a new Cashier Training video for stores to use to train cashiers and managers on WIC basics. Please refer to the "Cashier Training Video" article for additional information.

- There have been a few changes to the Sanction Schedule, which lists all of the violations eligible for a WIC Program administrative action. Here are the latest changes to the violations (and their associated penalty):
    - The UPC of the item scanned is different from the UPC of the actual WIC approved item being purchased ($100 fine, per incident, once pattern requirement is met.)
    - WIC shelf labels are not consistently used on foods that have this requirement, as identified in the WIC Approved Food List ($100 fine, per incident, once pattern requirement is met.)

Please refer to the "The Vendor Sanction System" article for additional information.

- Our entire WIC website has been redesigned to be easier to read and navigate.
- The full list of all approved food items by UPC code is now our webpage. Please refer to the "Approved Product List Now Available Online" article <hotlinked to the article> for additional information.
- We have updated the policy requiring a printed copy of our Retail Store Manual at each store. Retail stores can now use electronic access either directly to the version available on our website or to a current copy that has been saved to your internal network or computer. Of course, you are welcome to print a copy of the manual as well or request a printed copy via the Retailer Supply Request Form.

Time to Clean Up

If you haven't done so already, now is the perfect time to clean out your WIC Retail Store Binder.
Please discard these items:

- WIC Approved Food Lists, Formula and/or Juice Flyers prior to January 1, 2016
- Retailer Bulletins prior to January 1, 2016
- Correspondence dated prior to January 1, 2015

After October 1, 2017, please discard the old Retailer Agreement covering the period October 1, 2014 through September 30, 2017.

The most current Retail Store Manual is available on the WIC Retailer Resources webpage. Hard copies of the Retail Store Manual can be ordered using the Retailer Supply Request Form available on our website. Only keep current materials in your binder.

Online Resources

Here are the links that allow you to navigate to all of the online resources related to the Virginia WIC Program:

- Virginia WIC Program Homepage:
    - http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/wic or
    - www.wicva.com or
    - search for "VA WIC" in your favorite search engine
- Virginia WIC Retailers Homepage
- Virginia WIC Retailers - Resources (training resources, guidance, fillable forms, etc.)
    - Vendor Compliance Team Directory (key names, emails and phone numbers)
- State Administrative Code, Virginia WIC Program
- USDA Food and Nutrition Service WIC site

Cashier Training Video

The **new** WIC cashier training video is now available to supplement the training needs of cashiers and other store personnel on the WIC Program. The video consists of 5 modules:

Module A: Welcome to WIC!
Module B: How Does eWIC Work?
Module C: Making WIC Customers the Priority
Module D: Your Role in Ensuring Program Integrity
Module E: Training Tips

Module A has separate modules for Integrated and Stand-Beside systems. The "Integrated" Module is used for a store whose point of sale (POS) system automatically identifies eWIC products from non-WIC items in a single transaction. The "Stand Beside" Module is used for stores using the equipment provided from Xerox that processes only eWIC items independently from any other POS system.

Module E is designed to specifically assist the trainer with providing effective instruction to cashiers and other store personnel.

Each module is between 3-4 minutes long with three questions after each module.

All of the videos are available from YouTube and can also be viewed directly using the links on the Retailer Resources webpage. Additionally, starting in July 2017, the videos will be available for distribution on DVD or flash drive (MP4 or Quick Time files), which can be uploaded to your company's intranet. There is also an answer key for the questions posed in the video. Stores with certified trainers will receive copies of the videos through their corporate offices. Stores without trainers can order a DVD or flash drive via the Retailer Supply Request Form.

Supplemental Foods

The Virginia WIC Program distributed a new approved food list in March 2016 that provides information for all of its WIC eligible foods. The 2016 WIC Approved Food List (English | Spanish) and Infant Formula Flyer (English | Spanish) are available online or can be ordered using the Retailer Supply Request Form.

WIC Eligible foods are summarized here:

- **Whole Wheat Breads** -- The specific approved brands of Whole Wheat Breads are not listed in the WIC Approved Food Brochure; however the list of the approved Whole Wheat Breads is available online.
- **Whole, 2%, and Reduced Fat (1% and skim) Milk** -- Stores should continue to select the "best value" (lowest cost) WIC eligible brand of milk as their preferred brand.
- **Legumes (Beans/Peas/Lentils)** -- Only the following types are eligible:

  - Black beans
  - Great Northern beans
  - Kidney beans (dark/light)
  - Lentils
  - Navy beans
  - Pinto beans
  - Red beans
  - Black-eyed peas
  - Butter/Lima beans
  - Chickpeas/Garbanzo beans

- **Infant (Baby) Foods** -- Single and Twin-packs of 4 ounce containers of infant fruits and vegetables are allowed.
- **Juice** -- Selected brands of refrigerated juice have been added. Additional brands of apple and grape juice (frozen and liquid) have been added, including certain varieties of several national brands (e.g. Welch's, Juicy Juice).
- **Breakfast Cereal** -- New brands and varieties were published in the 2016 Approved Food List.
- **Cheese, Eggs, Peanut Butter and Canned Fish**: No change.

Specific product information can be found online in the Current Approved Product List. Additional information can be found on the WIC Retailer Resources web page.

Submitting New Universal Product Codes (UPCs)

WIC authorized retailers and food manufacturers/suppliers can submit any changes to UPCs by completing an UPC Update Request Form using the instructions provided.
The following information must be included with the UPC Update Request Form:

- Product labels/images showing brand name, UPC, ingredient list and package size.
- 12 digits UPC code including a last check digit.

The completed UPC Update Request Form and supporting documents should be submitted to the VA WIC Program via email or by mailing to this address:
Attn: Brian Tun, WIC UPC Coordinator
Division of Community Nutrition
Virginia Department of Health
109 Governor Street, 8th Floor
Richmond, VA 23219

All submissions must be for the WIC-approved food categories and products identified in the current WIC Approved Food List (English | Spanish) or Infant Formula Flyer (English | Spanish).

Approved Product List Now Available

The Virginia Approved Product List (APL) is now available for retailers to view or download from our Retailer Resources webpage. Each morning at 5:00 AM the most current APL file is downloaded and reformatted into an easy-to-read Microsoft® Excel® file, with the sheet name indicating of the date of the download. Please contact Brian Tun by email or 804-864-7849 if you have any questions about this file or its contents.

Mapping Fresh Produce to a Generic PLU

The VA WIC Program requires WIC authorized retailers with integrated cash register systems to map all of their fresh produce PLU (Price Lookup) codes to corresponding PLU codes assigned by the International Federation for Produce Standards (IFPS). Retailers are also allowed to map any or all fresh produce PLU codes to generic PLU 4469 or 44691.

For example, fresh broccoli can be coded to PLU 40600 or generic PLUs 4469 or 44691.
The Virginia WIC Program does not allow:

- GTINs (Global Trade Item Number)
- Genetically-modified PLUs (prefix of 8)
- Retailer assigned PLUs
- Random weight UPCs (prefix of 2)
- Non-standard and vendor specific UPCs (prefix of 4 or 9)

The Virginia WIC Program has included organic PLU codes (prefix of 9) to be used for fresh organic produce. Generic PLUs (4469 or 44691) are not to be used for frozen or canned fruits and vegetables since their UPC codes are being actively maintained by the Virginia WIC Program. You can submit your frozen or canned fruits and vegetables to be added on an Approved Product List (APL) by completing a UPC Update Request form.

UPCs and standard PLUs should always be used for fresh produce if they are available. The generic PLU 4469 or 44691 should be used only if there is no UPC/PLU to use or if the UPC cannot be scanned.

If you have any questions about the mapping process for fresh produce, please contact the UPC Coordinator, Brian Tun via email or 804-864-7849.

Processing eWIC Transactions

To ensure each cardholder receives the correct formula and foods prescribed to them, cashiers should always do the following:

1. Individually scan each item and allow the point of sale (POS) system to determine if the food is eligible to be purchased by the cardholder.
2. Never assume an item is not allowed and never refuse a purchase based on visual observation, or a cardholder's previous WIC purchases.
3. Never use the multiplier key for multiple purchases of the same items, as this could possibly result in an overcharge.
4. WIC eligible brands available may vary depending on the food category (e.g., whole grains, liquid juices, etc.) For additional information on which food categories have restrictions, please refer to the WIC Approved Food List.
5. A copy of the WIC Approved Food List should be at your register. The eligible brand types listed on the food list include:
    a. Store brand;
    b. Selected brand;
    c. Any brand; and
    d. Best Value brand (applies to cow's milk only).
6. If you are unable to locate the WIC Approved Food List at your register, inform your manager to request additional copies from the State WIC office or download a copy from our website at http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/wic-retailers.
7. If a prescribed item does not scan as being "WIC Approved", report the item to store management so that the Universal Product Code (UPC) can be submitted to the Virginia WIC Program. If the item is approved, it can be sold as WIC.
8. Always refer to the WIC Approved Food Brochure, Infant Formula flyer, or your eWIC Cashier handbook to answer questions. If further help is needed, call for manager assistance.
9. Always remember to respect the confidentiality of the WIC cardholder.
10. Never enter an eWIC cardholder's pin number.
11. Cardholders are allowed to use their loyalty cards or coupons if your store has them or accepts coupons.
12. Keep this checklist handy and review with your cashiers and other store personnel.

Minimum Stocking and Shelf Label Requirements

Retailers are required at all times to have in stock a minimum quantity of certain food items. Unannounced Store Monitoring Reviews are performed to check that the minimum stocking requirement is met, as well as other items of compliance. The chart below provides a quick reference guide showing the current minimum stocking requirement, as well as

the current shelf label requirement. Please contact your vendor liaison if you have any questions.

The Vendor Complaint Process

All complaints or incidents related to an eWIC cardholder should be reported by completing the Retailer Complaint and Incident Form using the instructions provided. The completed form should be sent to your Vendor Liaison via email, fax or USPS mail.

Once complaints have been received, State WIC Office staff may contact the store to fully understand the incident, document the incident, and if necessary, discuss any corrective action that is required to help prevent a reoccurrence. The WIC Program strives to ensure that complaints are resolved in a manner that improves the services provided to all participants.

If you have any questions concerning complaints or incidents, please refer to the Complaints and Incidents section of your Retailer Manual or contact your Vendor Liaison.

The Vendor Sanction System

The Virginia WIC Program is mandated by the USDA to conduct undercover compliance investigations at authorized retailers. The type of violations tested is identified in the sanction schedule. The current Sanctions, Compliance and Program Violation schedule was previously provided to you with the annual compliance reminder letter that was mailed earlier this year.

The sanction schedule addresses both state and federal violations. The sanction schedule also shows different levels of severity for the offense, ranging from a warning letter to permanent disqualification. Some of the minor offenses include not providing a receipt to cardholders unless expressly declined or charging sales tax on eWIC purchases. The most severe charges include trafficking and illegally buying and selling WIC benefits for fire arms, ammunition, explosives, or controlled substances. During an investigation, the WIC Program will always provide a written notice of the violation, unless the notice will compromise the investigation. Please review the sanction schedule to familiarize yourself with activities that are deemed a violation. It is also important that you share this information with your store personnel and cashiers to ensure everyone understands these program requirements.

The sanction schedule is available online and can also be provided upon request. If you have any questions about WIC violations, please contact Alex Acharya by email or at 804-864-7811.

Vendor Claims

A Vendor Claims assessment is a requirement for a retailer to repay the Virginia WIC Program for an erroneous or unauthorized reimbursement. Reimbursements for any foods, formulas or medical foods ineligible for purchase using the eWIC benefit card may result in a Vendor Claims assessment. An example of when a Vendor Claim may be assessed is when a generic Product Look-Up (PLU 4469 or 44691) code is improperly used when processing an eWIC transaction. These types of violations discovered during a compliance investigation can lead to a Vendor Claim being assessed, as well as the store's WIC Program authorization being at risk for disqualification.

Vendor Claim and a Compliance Investigation – A store must reimburse the WIC Program for the amount paid on ineligible products purchased during a compliance investigation. If repayment is required, then the WIC Program will send a written request to affected stores identifying the amount owed and due date of the Vendor Claim.

Vendor Claim Dispute – Stores are required to send in their Vendor Claim payment within 20 calendar days after receiving notice of the payment obligation. To dispute a Vendor Claim, the store must send a written request to the Virginia WIC Program explaining the reasons for disputing the claim within 15 calendar days after receiving notice of the payment obligation.

Incentives

Federal WIC regulations forbid offering incentives solely to WIC participants in an effort to encourage them to redeem food benefits at your store. Some examples of incentives include: giving away free food or non-food items such as raffle tickets or lottery tickets. Section 246.12(h)(3)(iii) of the Federal WIC regulations requires retailers to offer WIC participants the same courtesies that are offered to non-WIC customers. The reverse is also true. WIC authorized stores may not deny WIC participants incentive items that are offered to non-WIC customers. Remember to always treat WIC and non-WIC customers the same.

Infant Formula Suppliers

To protect the health and wellbeing of WIC participants, all infant formula that may be sold to Virginia WIC participants must be purchased by a supplier authorized by the state of Virginia. The current list of approved formula suppliers is available online. If you wish to source formula for WIC participants from a supplier not on this list, the wholesaler/distributer must contact their Vendor Liaison and request to become an authorized supplier.

Not To Exceed (NTE)

The amount that the state will reimburse a retailer for a WIC product is determined by analyzing average sale prices for that item, along with comparing sales from like-sized and similar geographically situated retailers using peer groups. The maximum amount reimbursed is called the **Not to Exceed** amount or NTE. The NTE is calculated and evaluated weekly and can be adjusted as needed. If retailers feel a reimbursement limit is set too low, they can request to have it investigated for a possible NTE adjustment. Please contact the NTE coordinator, Amy Romero, by email if you have a question about NTEs or want to request an NTE investigation.

WIC On Wheels

WIC On Wheels is now rolling along!!!! The WIC On Wheels (WOW) Project was funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture through special grant monies. It is a joint venture with several partners: Virginia WIC Program [State WIC Office and six (6) health districts in the Tidewater Region of Virginia (Hampton, Peninsula, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Chesapeake and Western Tidewater)], Old Dominion University, and Virginia Cooperative Extension. This is a mobile solution to "normal" clinic operations. The mobile clinic will rotate between select neighborhood grocery stores in the Tidewater area.

Currently, the three positions have been hired. The positions are Nutritionist, Nutritionist Associate, and Nutritionist Assistant. These staff members mirror the responsibilities in the local WIC agencies. The staff began their employment on March 13, 2017. Their training has been completed, which included Crossroads Computer training and Cooking Matters at the Store Tour. The Norfolk Health District has been selected as the pilot local agency location. In addition, the Farm Fresh store in the Ocean View area of Norfolk was the pilot site of the store tours. The first tour was conducted on May 8, 2017. Food Lion will be the second authorized vendor to join the WOW Project with tours beginning on June 6, 2017.

We want to thank our vendor partners for their support of WOW. If you have any questions or want to be considered for this or other similar efforts in the future, please contact Paula Garrett, Virginia WIC Program Manager, via email or at 804-864-7847.

2018 WIC Food Application Process

The Virginia WIC Program is accepting applications for the 2018 Virginia WIC Approved Food List from June 1, 2017 through July 31, 2017. Applications are only required for new products in the food categories offered through the Virginia WIC Program. Currently approved WIC products are not required to be resubmitted.

The following changes from the 2016 Approved Food List will now be allowed if they meet the USDA nutritional requirements, and can be submitted for consideration:

- All brands, including national brands, for breakfast cereals, cheese, and peanut butter;
- Yogurt and whole wheat pasta;
- All single varieties of legumes (dried and canned) in eligible container sizes;
- Liquid and frozen juices for new store applicants only.

All applications must be submitted using the New Food Application Worksheet and sending it via email to wicfoods@vdh.virginia.gov**. Completed applications must be**

submitted by midnight July 31, 2017, as applications received after the deadline will not be considered. No paper submissions are allowed. All submitters should read thoroughly the instructions found on the “Instructions” tab of Food Application Worksheet.

Please note that nutritional requirements, approved package type and container size for all food categories are listed in the New Food Application Worksheet under each category.

Please contact Deborah Walton via email or 804-864-7846 should you have any questions or concerns about the Virginia WIC Food Application process.

Staffing Updates

Robert (Bob) Altermatt was recently hired on the Vendor Team as a Prevention Specialist. He will conduct investigations on compliance with WIC Vendors and analysis on redemption data. Bob’s name may sound familiar, as he has worked with Virginia WIC for 12 months as contractor before being selected as a full-time employee (see the April 2016 Edition of the Working With WIC Retailer Bulletin). Bob may be contacted by email or 804-864-7855.

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Our mailing address is:
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Division of Community Nutrition | WIC
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Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g. Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.), should contact the Agency (State or local) where they applied for benefits. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing or have speech disabilities may contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program complaint of discrimination, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, (AD-3027) found online at: http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html, and at any USDA office, or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:
(1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
(2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or
(3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

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