



Working With WIC Retailer Bulletin

DIVISION OF COMMUNITY NUTRITION

February 2015

Message from Mike

I want to first wish everyone a belated Happy New Year and to thank all for a very successful 2014 for the Virginia WIC Program. Without your strong commitment to serving WIC cardholders, our successes would not have materialized.

On November 20, 2014 Governor McAuliffe created by Executive Order the Commonwealth Council on Bridging the Nutritional Divide. The Council will seek to achieve three major objectives:

1. Eliminate childhood hunger in Virginia;
2. Promote Virginia's leading industry – agriculture;
3. Facilitate efficient and effective local initiatives related to community nutrition, food access, and health strategies.

The Council consists of many public and private members and are leaders in their respective fields. The food industry is represented by store owners, restaurant owners, as well as officers from various associations. One of the goals under the elimination of childhood hunger is to increase participation in the WIC and Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP). I am also a member of the Council and am excited and look forward to this important endeavor. As stated in the Executive Order, **"All Virginians, especially those at early ages, must have access to nutritious, affordable, and locally sourced foods that will enable them to learn, grow, and thrive."**

Many of you already have demonstrated a commitment to end hunger in Virginia. I was impressed during this past Christmas season with the many programs that were operated by you that allowed shoppers to contribute money to provide meals for the hungry. I even heard a story where a cashier stated that she always has money in her pocket to assist customers when they run short. If your company did provide food or funds this past year, I would love to hear back from you regarding your successes.

As I mentioned, the Virginia WIC Program made significant advances in 2014. We do not plan to stop in 2015. Although it is too early to go into too much detail, VDH has received special funding to develop ways to make the shopping experience for WIC cardholders easier. We know that many already have smart phones, so we are looking at ways to use these to help the cardholders become better informed when they shop at your stores. In addition, we are in the process of hiring a social marketer to assist in keeping in touch with our cardholders.

Again, I thank all of you for everything you do by providing nutritious foods to WIC families .

Michael J. Welch, Ph. D.
Director
Division of Community Nutrition
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An Important Update - Potatoes

Pursuant to the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act (2015) enacted by the Federal government on December 16, 2014, white potatoes are now eligible to be purchased by WIC cardholders when using their Cash Value Benefits (CVBs, previously known as Cash Value Vouchers, or CVVs prior to implementing eWIC). Now WIC Programs are required to allow **all** varieties of fresh, whole or cut vegetables (fresh, canned or frozen) that have no additives. The Virginia WIC Program plans to fully implement this federally mandated change as of **March 2, 2015**. This change will mean that potatoes (fresh, canned

or frozen) that do not include any added sugars, fats or oils will be allowed for purchase, after March 2, 2015. Retailers, manufacturers and suppliers have been asked to submit UPC Update Request form(s) and supporting documentation for products that may be considered under this change. Remember, as we move forward with implementing this change, a UPC Update Request form must be submitted for all WIC eligible items containing potatoes in order to update the APL accordingly. If you have any questions about this change or how to get items added to the WIC Approved Product List, please contact Brian Tun, UPC Coordinator (Brian.Tun@vdh.virginia.gov).

** Special Notice ** Working With WIC is now ONLY an eBulletin

This edition of Working With WIC Retailer Bulletin marks the first edition that will not be printed. From now on, each bulletin will only be available online, with its web link distributed via email. The updated eBulletin format is best viewed online, but you can also print it, if desired. Eliminating printing and postage will result in a cost savings of about \$10,000 per year and should allow important information to be disseminated more rapidly. As always, suggestions, comments or ideas on how to improve the Bulletin can be sent to WIC_Retailer@vdh.virginia.gov.



Consistent with the Program’s continued commitment to provide enhanced customer service to authorized retailers, Vendor Liaisons are available to provide **eWIC “Live Buy”** Testing in addition to the routine monitoring visits. When eWIC is first installed for a new store, or when there are equipment or software system changes, State WIC Office staff is available to come out and do ‘live buys’.

These ‘live buys’ use an actual eWIC card and the products are purchased using WIC funds which are later donated to a local food bank. These actual WIC purchases assist cashiers in identifying or addressing concerns they may have in handling eWIC transactions. Additionally, on-site testing also helps to troubleshoot problems in advance, which may reduce processing errors in the future.

Please contact your assigned Vendor Liaison for further information on how to schedule a “eWIC live buy” test!

Local Agency WIC Staff eWIC Shopping Insight

Recently, the State WIC Office provided an opportunity to our health district staff to shop at WIC authorized stores using the new eWIC benefit cards. The purpose of this exercise was to have WIC staff gain firsthand experience actually using the eWIC benefit card to have a similar experience to what a eWIC cardholder might have. Using the WIC Approved Food List and looking for the WIC shelf labels, the WIC staff shopped at various stores. During these store visits, some WIC staff announced they were from the local health district and others did not identify themselves. Every single staff member came back with a new perspective pertaining to shopping

for WIC food items at stores. The issues the staff experienced were ones that could only be appreciated when shopping using a eWIC benefit card. Through the shopping exercise, WIC staff became aware of common issues that may occur, allowing them to be more effective training eWIC cardholders on how to shop for WIC foods. It also gave WIC staff a better understanding of client issues as well as store issues. Even with some challenges, local agency staff overwhelming felt that the eWIC process used was much better than the old paper system.

Cooking Matters at the Store



The Virginia WIC Program is planning to partner with “Share Our Strength” in sponsoring a new initiative, called **Cooking Matters at the Store**. The focus of this initiative is to make shopping with WIC benefits easier for Virginia WIC participants/ cardholders. The initiative consists of a free interactive grocery store tour, lead by local WIC dietitians and nutritionists. The nutritionist’s lesson plan consist of teaching basic nutrition and food shopping

while focusing on how to choose WIC foods. During the grocery tour, participants will discuss the wide variety of foods available to them through WIC and learn how to find those foods in their local store(s) using the WIC Approved Food List. Since 2012, **Cooking Matters at the Store** has helped to create positive shopping experiences for WIC participants. The Virginia WIC Program is excited about moving forward with this collaborative effort in the months ahead.

88% of WIC parent graduates are very or completely confident in their ability to make the most of WIC fruits and vegetable benefits.

The impact of **Cooking Matters at the Store** for WIC participants:

85% of WIC parent graduates are very or completely confident in their ability to identify WIC foods at the grocery store.

Please contact Paula Garrett, WIC Program Manager (Paula.Garrett@vdh.virginia.gov) if you have additional questions about this new initiative.

Compliance and Performance Monitoring Update

Annually, the Virginia WIC Program sends a Compliance and Performance Monitoring Reminder letter to all stores and corporate contacts. The purpose of this reminder letter is to ensure retailers understand and follow WIC policies and regulations. This year's letter was mailed in January. A summary of the type of issues covered in this letter included:

- a. "Secret Shopper" compliance buys – their purpose and what comprises a compliance investigation;
- b. Infant formula audits/reviews – the information needed from retail stores;
- c. Desk review of formula purchasing records – the information needed from retail stores; and
- d. Unannounced on-site stocking visits – a paperless iPhone App is now used to document monitoring visit results.

If you did not get a copy of this Compliance and Performance Monitoring letter, or if you have questions about the letter or questions about any of our compliance and performance monitoring efforts, please contact Alex Acharya by telephone at 804-864-7811 or by email at alex.acharya@vdh.virginia.gov.

iPhone Monitoring Reviews – Using New Solutions to Improve Outcomes



As of October 1, 2014, the WIC Program is using the iPhone App exclusively to document on-site monitoring visits.

A few additional changes from the old "paper" process worth noting are outlined below, specifically:

- a. Warning letters for "Failed" minimum stocking visits will continue to be sent via Certified Mail; however, if no minimum stocking issues were identified, notification on all other issues (e.g. missing/incorrect shelf labels, missing shelf prices) are now sent only via email to the email address on file for the store (Corporate Contact for corporate stores, or Store Manager for non-corporate stores). Training materials identified as "missing" during the store visit will automatically be sent to the store manager via US Mail.
- b. Copies of the electronic monitoring record will not be provided to stores. Stores can request this information and have a link to APL Central and the online record sent to the store via email. Using this information, the store manager can access, view and print the completed Monitoring Review record, if desired.
- c. Presently, only State WIC Office staff members can use the iPhone App to conduct on-site monitoring review visits. In 2015, the iPhone App will be enhanced and training will be provided to allow the iPhone to be used by local agency staff, to conduct these types of program monitoring visits.

The iPhone App has been a successful method and allowed the Program to significantly reduce the handling of paper. Additionally, this new approach continues to reduce our administrative costs. Your support of this strategic change is greatly appreciated.



In October, suppliers, manufacturers and retailers received notice to submit Food Applications for new food items to the WIC Program. The due date for submitting foods for inclusion in the 2015 Food List closed as of January 31, 2015.

WIC Program staff is now reviewing each of the Food Applications received in order to determine which foods can be added or removed from the new food list based upon Federal and State guidelines. The Program's goal is to have a new WIC Approved Food List printed, distributed to all affected parties and fully implemented by October 1, 2015.

Retail System Integration



If your store currently has Xerox stand beside equipment and you plan to change to an integrated Point of Sales (POS) system, you must notify the State WIC Office to make arrangements

to have your new system certified to process eWIC transactions. This certification process ensures that your POS system adheres to Unit-

ed States Department of Agriculture's (USDA's) Operating Rules for handling eWIC transactions. Failure to complete this important step may result in your store's eWIC transactions being incorrectly processed and this outcome can affect your eWIC reimbursements.

Retailers should send written notification requesting POS certification assistance to: WIC_Retailers@vdh.virginia.gov. In your request, please include: Your store name, WIC ID, name

of POS Contractor, email address, telephone number, and proposed system changeover date.

For additional information about the Virginia WIC Program's certification process, please contact Brian Tun (UPC Coordinator) by email (Brian.Tun@vdh.virginia.gov) or by telephone (804-864-7849). Mr. Tun works directly with the Xerox Corporation and the retailer's POS contact to complete the required certification process.

Not-To-Exceed (NTE) Update

The State WIC Office generates monthly a report that identifies the difference between the amount requested versus the amount paid based upon system NTE settings. Program staff will continue making monthly adjusted payments to stores for transactions that have been underpaid. Ultimately, the goal is to reduce these underpayments by continuing to adjust NTEs.

Corporate stores with shared banking information should have received aggregated payment notifications.

Conversely, independent and other stores with individual banking information have



also received adjustment notifications for payments processed over the past several

months. If you have any questions about these adjusted payments, please directly contact Jessica Owen Day (jessica.owen.day@vdh.virginia.gov).

Moving forward, adjusted payment communications with store and payment amount detail will be sent to designated representatives when payments are reconciled through Xerox, the eWIC Processor. The WIC Program is making every effort to ensure NTE setup is optimal and reimbursement levels remain reasonable.

Tools for Checking Account Balances

Cashiers and retail store staff aim to provide quality customer service to eWIC cardholders and non-cardholders alike. In an example of going the extra mile for cardholders, please see the below letter that we received from a cardholder regarding an anonymous store and cashier.

Dear WIC,

I am a single mom looking to get in and out of the grocery store without chaos and confusion with my three sons. I am extremely grateful for the WIC Program, as everyone has always been helpful. Recently, I thought I had benefits on my eWIC benefit card, but when I got to the register, I realized that I had forgotten that I already used them on my previous grocery trip. I always get a balance after my purchases, but in all honesty, I normally throw my receipt away by mistake, without knowing what benefits I have remaining. I made this known to the cashier that was ringing up my purchases the last time I went shopping and she gave me a list of other ways that I may find my benefit balance. I remember the clinic staff going over a few options with me once I received my card, but there was so much to remember that I thought the only way to get my benefit balance was to look at my receipt after a purchase or to go back into the clinic. I had no idea there were other ways! The cashier informed me that she too was a eWIC cardholder and she used the automated text messaging service to receive her balance, and that all I had to do was to register online. I also opted-in to receive text messages of my benefit balance. I also learned that I can go to the store's customer service desk area prior to making a purchase and they will print off my balance for me at the store. I can even print off my own benefit balance at home. That has been a great help, as I try to plan my meals for each week ahead. I just wanted to thank her for making my shopping trips faster and easier for my family, and for informing me that there are other ways to receive a eWIC balance.

Thanks WIC - From a Very Grateful WIC Mom!

The WIC Program appreciates our retailers who provide an invaluable service in educating cardholders about the check-out process. If you have any additional suggestions, or would like additional information about the options available to cardholders to receive their benefit balance, please email the WIC Program at WIC_Retailer@vdh.virginia.gov.

What Is An Infant Formula Review?



Virginia Department of Health
109 Governor Street, 9th Floor
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Phone: (804) 864-7800
Fax: (804) 864-7854



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Each year the WIC Program is required to complete certain compliance processes to ensure program integrity. One such process conducted by the Program is an Infant Formula Records Reviews. This review is where the WIC Program staff requests a retailer to provide copies of their infant formula purchasing records for a specified historical period. Once received, these records are reviewed against redemption data in order to validate that the retailer is using approved formula suppliers.

The WIC Program is scheduled to perform approximately 30 infant formula records reviews in 2015, which means a retailer has about a 3-4% percent chance of being selected. **Please remember that all retailers are required to maintain at least 12 months of the most current infant formula purchasing records from all sources, including their primary formula supplier.** Retailers are required to provide these records to the WIC Program staff within 15 calendar days once they receive a written request.

UPC (Universal Product Code) Update Request Form

The online submission of UPC update requests using the APL Central application is still unavailable. Stores and corporate retailers should continue to use the UPC Update Request form and product images as usual. Important Reminder: A valid UPC must include the full 12 digit code (**9-99999-99999-9**).

Please submit completed UPC forms and images via email to:
Brian.Tun@vdh.virginia.gov or WIC_Retailer@vdh.virginia.gov

Upon receipt of the completed UPC Update Request form, WIC staff will review and determine if the UPC items submitted is approved and can be added to the VA Approved Product List database. Additional information may be requested if deemed necessary. Once the form has been reviewed by State WIC Office staff, you will be notified via email the outcome of your submission.



UPC Update Request Form

<http://www.vahealth.org/DCN/Vendor/Files/PDFs/UPCUpdateRequestForm2.pdf>



Instructions for the UPC Update Request Form:

<http://www.vahealth.org/DCN/Vendor/Files/PDFs/UPCUpdateRequestFormInstructions2.pdf>

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Important Links and Numbers

Training & Resources:



www.vahealth.org/DCN/Vendor/retailstorepubs.htm

For Participants:



<http://www.vahealth.org/DCN/General%20Info/EBT/participant.htm>

Xerox Retailer Help Desk:

877-436-6057

Vendor Liaison:

804-864-7800 and ask to speak to a Vendor Liaison