

Hemoglobin Screening – Talking Points

NOVEMBER 13, 2024

Purpose and importance of hemoglobin screening

The WIC program aims to safeguard the health of women, infants, and children up to age 5 who are at nutritional risk. As a prevention program, WIC screens for iron-deficiency anemia and assures families obtain appropriate health care when risk of anemia is identified.

Talking points for WIC staff

The following are suggested talking points for WIC staff to address participant questions or concerns about hemoglobin screening. Tailor the talking points to the concerns/questions of the individual participant.

- The hemoglobin test is a screening for iron-deficiency anemia.
 - WIC participants are at risk for iron-deficiency anemia.
 - Women have a large increase in blood volume during pregnancy which can cause anemia.
 - Infants and children are growing rapidly. Some children go through picky eating phases which may affect their consumption of iron-rich foods.
 - It is a quick finger stick.
 - The testing is done by trained health professionals.
- Why screening for iron-deficiency anemia is important:
 - Iron-deficiency anemia causes fatigue and decreased ability to fight infection.
 - During pregnancy, iron is transferred to the baby since it is needed for their growth and development. Iron-deficiency anemia is associated with higher rates of prematurity and subsequent low birth weight.
 - Children need iron to grow and develop properly. Iron helps move oxygen from the lungs to the rest of the body.
 - Iron is important for brain development. Children with iron-deficiency anemia can develop learning and behavioral problems.
 - Iron-deficiency makes children more susceptible to absorbing lead.

Preparing families for the hemoglobin screening

- Inform family of the hemoglobin screening when setting up an appointment.

HEMOGLOBIN SCREENING-TALKING POINTS

- Check whether hemoglobin is required at the next appointment. Train support staff on the hemoglobin schedule requirements and how to find the testing results in the Information System.
- Send information about hemoglobin screening expectations before the appointment via mail, text, or email. Some documents with this information include the [Welcome to WIC](#) brochure and [WIC Appointments](#)
- Review the [Welcome to WIC](#) brochure with new families. Point out the information on pages 10-11 about hemoglobin. Address any questions the family has about the hemoglobin screening before collecting measurements.

Reducing resistance

- Train staff on working with families who are resistant to the hemoglobin screening and how to address their concerns.
- Create a less stressful environment for families.
 - Have all the hemoglobin screening supplies ready before the family enters the clinic/lab area. This helps prevent building anxiety over the finger stick.
 - Explain the hemoglobin screening process to the participants.
 - Here is a fun explanation for small children: “Let’s give your finger a bath (wipe the finger with the wipe). Now I am drying your finger with my towel. Next, we will make some bubbles and count them (stick the finger), this is my bubble collector (cuvette). I’m going to put the bubble collector in my bubble machine (Hemocue) and see what magic number comes up.”
 - Another example: Tell the child “I’m going to find the tallest finger and wash it off.” Call the cuvette a “tickler”.
 - Get down to level of the child and talk with them.
 - Direct family during the process to encourage proper positioning of the child. Ask “Will your child be more comfortable sitting on your lap for the finger stick?”. Most parents/caregivers will say yes and place the child on their lap. Ask the parent/caregiver to “Please hold your child’s elbow here” to keep the child’s arm stable without reducing blood supply to the fingers.
 - Use the recommended length of blade/needle and gauge. The blade or needle should be about 1.5mm for children and less than 2.4 mm for women.
 - Use fun distractions. Ask the child to:
 - Play **I spy**. Ask the child to find an item on a poster and or laminated sheet.
 - Watch an animated toy, a perpetual motion machine, or a glitter filled water tube.
 - Pick out a small reward. Ask the child to choose a sticker from a container.
 - Blow on an inexpensive pin wheel. The child can keep the pin wheel.

- Count or sing the ABCs. Recite a nursery rhyme with the child.
- Offer options when applicable.
 - The family can obtain measurements from the health care provider before the appointment.
 - Staff can offer a toe stick vs. finger stick for infants and small children.

Additional resources for WIC staff

- The Valuable Role WIC Staff Play in Preventing and Addressing Iron Deficiency Anemia webinar available on the [Minnesota Department of Health Learning Center](#).
- [WIC Hemoglobin Schedule](#) This memo was shared with health care providers in August 2024 to increase their understanding of hemoglobin measurement requirements for WIC and Child and Teen Checkups (C&TC). The goal is to better coordinate with health care providers, so families can use their appointment measurements to meet requirements of both WIC and C&TC programs whenever possible. Local agencies are encouraged to share this memo with health care providers in their community.

Reference – Complete Listing of Hyperlinks

[Welcome to WIC](https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/ewic/welcometowic.pdf) (https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/ewic/welcometowic.pdf)

[WIC Appointments](https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/appts.html) (https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/appts.html)

[Minnesota Department of Health Learning Center](https://www.health.state.mn.us/about/tools/learningcenter.html)
(https://www.health.state.mn.us/about/tools/learningcenter.html)

[WIC Hemoglobin Schedule](https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/nutrition/hemoglobinschedule.pdf)
(https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/nutrition/hemoglobinschedule.pdf)

Minnesota Department of Health - WIC Program, 625 Robert St. N, PO BOX 64975, ST PAUL MN 55164-0975; 1-800-657-3942, health.wic@state.mn.us, www.health.state.mn.us; to obtain this information in a different format, call: 1-800-657-3942.

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