

Section 1.17: Emergency Actions

10/2024

References: 7 CFR 246.4(a)(30), [Guide to Coordinating Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for WIC Service During Disasters](#), [WIC: Implementation of the Access to Baby Formula Act of 2022 and Related Provisions](#), [FNS Program Guidance on Human Pandemic Response](#)

Policy: In the event of an emergency (e.g., flood, fire, prolonged power outage, public health emergency, etc.), Local Agencies must follow community/regionally developed disaster plans as well as state procedures/Minnesota WIC state agency procedures.

Purpose: To ensure that WIC participants continue receiving WIC services and to secure WIC property and records.

Procedures

If an emergency prevents or limits a local agency's ability to carry out normal operations of the WIC Program, the local agency should:

1. Contact your State WIC Consultant for guidance on how to minimize interruptions to WIC services. Report on the following:
 - If assistance is needed
 - The number of WIC staff and participants affected by the emergency
 - The estimated length of service disruption
 - If electricity and/or water service has been disrupted
 - The safety of the water supply
 - The plan for providing essential WIC services such as nutrition education, breastfeeding services, benefit issuance, referrals, etc.
2. Seek information regarding your community/regional disaster plan. Follow applicable emergency procedures.
3. Follow applicable emergency procedures as set forth by state agencies or other governing bodies.

Guidance

The following sections provide general guidance for emergencies. Additional WIC flexibilities maybe available which are tailored to the type and scope of the emergency. Your state consultant can provide additional information specific to the situation.

Plan for Emergencies

Local agencies are encouraged to have a plan in place for dealing with emergencies. The plan may include:

- Community disaster coordinator contact information.
- Staff members' home phone numbers.
- Media contact information.
- Arrangements for securing computer/medical equipment, supplies, and participant records.

Clinic and Participant Accommodations to Consider

In consultation with state agency staff, consider clinic, and participant accommodations that can be made. Areas to consider (not every area may be applicable to the specific emergency situation):

Clinic site

- Are any of your WIC sites located in areas that are vulnerable due to the emergency? If so, consider alternate sites, limiting sites, or using alternate clinic days.

Staffing

- Extra CPA staff may be needed at WIC Clinics to make referrals and assess the appropriateness of the current WIC food package.
- Consider changing clinic and staff hours to include evenings and Saturdays to increase participant accessibility.
- Consider exchanging staff phone numbers, should there be a need to communicate from home or another site.
- In the case of a strike, it is the responsibility of the local agency administration and leadership to make decisions about staff contingencies.

Protecting program records, supplies, and WIC Information System equipment from possible damage

- Secure and/or move computer/medical equipment, supplies, participant documents, and program records.

Food Benefits

- Be prepared to review food packages and make adjustments to accommodate participants' access to safe water, refrigeration, and cooking facilities. For additional information on food package adjustments see [Chapter 7: Food Package](#), for example [Section 7.4: Supporting Breastfeeding with the WIC Food Package](#) and [Section 7.8: Food Package 2 \(for Infants 6-11 months\)](#).

- Consider flexibilities when issuing benefits and cards, such as remote issuance or connecting them to an alternate site. See [Chapter 8: WIC Cards](#).

Emergency food assistance

- Develop and maintain a list of emergency food resources to provide to victims of any disaster requiring food assistance.

Referrals

- Become familiar with and expand referral to other resources or services that families may need, such as temporary shelters, tetanus shots, mass feeding sites, insurance assistance, well-water testing, Red Cross, FEMA, etc.

Communications

- Use the media to inform participants and potential applicants of how to access WIC services, including clinic hours, and locations during the disaster.
- Notify your State Consultant of changes in office or clinic sites.

Evacuations

- If large scale evacuations are planned, Verification of Certification (VOC) forms may be provided so participants can receive WIC services in other states. See [Section 3.3: Transferring Participants](#).

Water source

- Will the emergency affect the water supply? If the water supply is contaminated, follow instructions from the Minnesota Department of Health and local water safety experts.
- Be aware of how water safety may affect WIC participants and their need for, or use of, WIC foods. For example, infants may need ready-to-feed infant formula. The State WIC may notify local WIC vendors of the increased need for ready-to-feed formula in areas where water might be contaminated. The State WIC agency may facilitate shipping of other types of formula to WIC Clinics.
- Encourage breastfeeding mothers to exclusively breastfeed, eliminating the need to prepare formula and minimizing the infant's exposure to unsafe water.

Supporting breastfeeding during emergencies

WIC encourages breastfeeding as the standard method of infant feeding. See [Breastfeeding in Emergencies](#) webpage for information on how to include breastfeeding in your emergency planning.

Suggestions to simplify clinic and benefit issuance procedures

Certification Procedures

- Utilize established flexibilities in certification procedures, such as using phone/Online Medical Assistance verification to serve as proof of identity, income, and residency if it includes all those areas and is up to date. If necessary, use a waiver for proof of identity, residency, or income. See [Section 5.2: Certification Procedures](#).
- Certification procedures may be modified as described in Streamlined Certification Process, [Exhibit 1-M: Streamlined Certification Process for Emergency Situations](#). Consult with State WIC Consultant before implementing.

Lost eWIC card

- Families may have lost their WIC card. If so, search the WIC Information System database to locate participants coming in without their WIC cards and issue a new card as needed. See [Section 8.5: Replacing WIC Cards](#).

Lost or damaged food benefits

- Participant might lose or have food benefits damaged during an emergency. Those food benefits may be replaced. See [Section 8.4: Issuing Food Benefits](#)

Mailing WIC cards

- Mailing/updating WIC nutrition and food benefits may be an option if the WIC Clinic is closed due to an emergency. Refer participants to a nearby clinic if available and convenient or mail replacement WIC cards as appropriate. See [Section 8.5 Replacing WIC Cards](#).

Homeless participants

- Mailing/updating WIC nutrition and food benefits may be an option if the WIC Clinic is closed due to an emergency. Refer participants to a nearby clinic if available and convenient or mail replacement WIC cards as appropriate. See [Chapter 8: WIC Cards](#).
- Refer to [Section 7.14: Food Package Options for Homeless Participants](#) and [Section 5.6: Homeless Applicants and Participants](#) for additional information on how to support homeless participants.

New Request for medical formula

- A written prescription is preferred, but if unavailable, attempt to get a 'verbal' prescription from the health care provider. Issue benefits for medical formula for one month and complete the documentation at the next benefit issuance. Follow normal issuance procedures in [Section 7.6: Medical Documentation](#).

Contact your State WIC Consultant if:

- Your agency is unable to serve all who are eligible.

- Your agency needs additional supplies, equipment, WIC cards, or other materials.
- Your agency or clinic is operating from a new address or at a different phone number.

Statewide Emergencies

In the case of a statewide emergency affecting WIC services to participants, USDA would assess the emergency and might approve the additional emergency actions to be implemented outside of normal WIC business authority. These could include:

- Mail/update food benefits from the WIC Information System directly to participants
- Coordinate commodity foods distribution from the USDA regional office
- Provide for alternate food delivery mechanisms – the Commissioner of Health may approve other food delivery mechanisms, if approved by USDA
- Permit formula shipments
- Provide ready-to-feed formula in the event that water is limited or unsafe
- Request financial assistance for additional costs

Resources

[Infant Feeding During Disasters](#) (HHS)

[Infant Feeding During Disasters and Emergencies](#) (AAP)

[Infant and Young Child Feeding in Emergencies Toolkit](#) (CDC)

[Safety Messages for Pregnant, Postpartum, and Breastfeeding People During Natural Disasters and Severe Weather](#) (CDC)

Reference – Complete Listing of Hyperlinks

[Guide to Coordinating Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for WIC Service During Disasters](https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/guide-coordinating-wic-service-during-disasters)
(<https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/guide-coordinating-wic-service-during-disasters>)

[WIC: Implementation of the Access to Baby Formula Act of 2022 and Related Provisions](https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/fr-121423)
(<https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/fr-121423>)

[FNS Program Guidance on Human Pandemic Response](https://www.fns.usda.gov/disaster/pandemic)
(<https://www.fns.usda.gov/disaster/pandemic>)

[Chapter 7: Food Package](https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/mom.html#foodpackage)
(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/mom.html#foodpackage>)

[Section 7.4: Supporting Breastfeeding with the WIC Food Package](https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/program/mom/chsctns/ch7/sctn7_4.pdf)
(https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/program/mom/chsctns/ch7/sctn7_4.pdf)

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Section 7.8: Food Package 2 (for Infants 6-11 months)

(https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/program/mom/chsctns/ch7/sctn7_8.pdf)

Chapter 8: WIC Cards

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/mom.html#cards>)

Section 3.3: Transferring Participants

(https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/program/mom/chsctns/ch3/sctn3_3.pdf)

Section 5.2: Certification Procedures

(https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/program/mom/chsctns/ch5/sctn5_2all.pdf)

Exhibit 1-M: Streamlined Certification Process for Emergency Situations

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/program/mom/exhbts/ex1/1m.pdf>)

Section 8.5: Replacing WIC Cards

(https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/program/mom/chsctns/ch8/sctn8_5.pdf)

Section 8.4: Issuing Food Benefits

(https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/program/mom/chsctns/ch8/sctn8_4.pdf)

Section 7.14: Food Package Options for Homeless Participants

(https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/program/mom/chsctns/ch7/sctn7_14.pdf)

Section 5.6: Homeless Applicants and Participants

(https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/program/mom/chsctns/ch5/sctn5_6.pdf)

Section 7.6: Medical Documentation

(https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/program/mom/chsctns/ch7/sctn7_6.pdf)

Infant Feeding During Disasters (<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ohsepr/resource/infant-feeding-during-disasters>)

Infant Feeding During Disasters and Emergencies

(<https://s3.amazonaws.com/aws.upl/nwica.org/disasterfactsheet6-2020.pdf>)

Infant and Young Child Feeding in Emergencies Toolkit (<https://www.cdc.gov/infant-feeding-emergencies-toolkit/php/index.html>)

Safety Messages for Pregnant, Postpartum, and Breastfeeding People During Natural Disasters and Severe Weather (<https://www.cdc.gov/reproductive-health/emergency-preparation-response/safety-messages.html>)

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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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