Pandemic Guidance for Local Agencies

Kansas WIC Program

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Overview

During a pandemic, there are several ways that Local WIC Agencies can minimize disruptions to WIC operations and ensure that eligible persons continue to receive benefits of WIC participation. This includes health assessments, nutrition education, breastfeeding support, referrals and supplemental foods. WIC regulations provide flexibility regarding physical presence, certification periods and the method of issuing EBT cards and food benefits.

During a pandemic event, the key public health intervention to slow the spread of the disease may be social distancing. Local Agencies may not be able to follow standard procedures when certifying applicants for WIC services due to restrictions on social gathering and will need to operate under alternate procedures.

Local Agencies shall put into place the following guidance when a State of Emergency has been declared for the State of Kansas or in your local community. This guidance may also be utilized to offer continued services to those families that have been directly impacted by the pandemic and are currently under quarantine (voluntary or involuntary). Please review policy, ADM: 07.01.00 KWIC Emergency Situation Plan and Reporting, for additional guidance when providing WIC services during an emergency, such as a pandemic or disaster.

Local Agencies must publicly notify clients of alternate procedures and/or locations.
Certification Guidance

New Certifications/Re-Certifications

Under normal conditions, State and Local agencies must require all applicants to be physically present at each WIC certification, unless the applicant meets the allowed exception criteria. Standard exceptions are made for qualified applicants who are disabled, have a medical condition that necessitates the use of medical equipment that is not easily transportable, medical conditions that require confinement to bed rest, and a serious illness that may be exacerbated by coming to the WIC clinic. An exception would also apply if applicants/family members are under a voluntary quarantine.

Suggestions for certification appointments for those that are unable to be physically present at the Local Agency are provided below. To implement these or other ideas, some thought should be made regarding available resources. Most of the below noted suggestions require little or no additional cost to the program.

- Phone calls
- Emails/Texts – an acceptable method to accomplish the submission of proofs. Clients may take a digital photo and can electronically send them to the Local Agency. Please review policy, CRT: 04.00.00 Proof of Identity, for additional guidance.
- Video Calls – Skype, Face Time, Facebook, Duo, GoTo Meeting, Zoom

Please review policy, CRT: 03.01.00 Exceptions to Being Physically Present, for more information and guidance.
Mid-Certifications

If a client or caregiver misses their mid-certification appointment, due to a pandemic, the appointment must be rescheduled at least once. The Local Agency shall reschedule the client at least 30 days from the date of the missed appointment and issue one month of benefits.

Separation of Duties

If the Local Agency is only staffed by one individual, a third party will be required to conduct a review of certification records within two (2) weeks of certification. The third-party reviewer will review the records of all non-breastfeeding infants and will randomly select at least twenty (20) percent of the remaining certification records for review. The third party must be an individual who has a supervisory or management function in the Local Agency, or parent agency, if applicable. If a Local Agency is unable to locate a third-party to conduct the review, contact your State Agency Lead for guidance.

For each client or caregiver that is certified by a single staff member, you must retain a copy of the client or caregiver’s income documentation and proof of identification. A separation of duties files must also be retained at the Local Agency. This file shall include the separation of duties log, income documentation, proof of identification and a copy of the diet questionnaire. Please review policy PRI: 06.01.00 Separation of Duties, for additional information and guidance.
**Secondary Nutrition Education**

In place of usual low risk and high-risk in person appointments, agencies may conduct all secondary nutrition education via phone. If LA chooses to conduct secondary nutrition education via phone, see Flow Chart in Appendix A for overall process and Appendix B for specific questions/content.

**Issuing EBT Cards and Food Benefits**

**Current Clients**

When current participants are unable to visit the Local Agency, or there is a staffing shortage, food benefits may be issued remotely. Please review policy [FCI: 04.08.00 Issuing Food Benefits without Caregiver/Adult Client Present](#), for additional information and guidance.

**Newly Certified Clients**

When newly certified client(s) or caregiver(s) are not physically present, or if there is a staffing shortage in the Local Agency, eWIC cards can be mailed and one month of food benefits can be issued at a time, until an appointment can be scheduled. If more than one month passes, food benefits can continue to be issued remotely one month at a time. Please review policy, [FCI: 04.07.00 Mailing eWIC Cards](#), for additional information and guidance.

**Tailor Food Packages**

Tailor food packages as needed for storage and cooking issues, shopping limitations, water supply, etc. See policy [FCI 02.04.00 Tailoring a Food Package](#).

**Redeeming benefits**

Inform WIC participants who are unable to redeem their food benefits because they or another family member are under voluntary or involuntary quarantine, that they have the option to provide their eWIC card and PIN to a trusted individual who is not under quarantine to redeem WIC benefits on their behalf.
Lost/Stolen/Damaged eWIC Cards

Local Agencies must respond to any report of a damaged, lost or stolen eWIC card within one business day of the date of report. The client or caregiver should be provided with a replacement eWIC card within seven (7) days, via mail. The Local Agency must identify a staff member that will be responsible for checking messages and inactivating any cards that are reported lost, damaged or stolen in KWIC. Please review policy, FCI: 04.05.00 Damaged, Lost or Stolen eWIC Cards, for additional information and guidance.

eWIC Card Supply

Local Agencies should review their card stock and ensure an adequate supply is available for staff use. If you identify that you may encounter a shortage, please reach out to your State Agency Lead. Cards are typically ordered every six (6) months, but if necessary we will do our best to accommodate an early order.

WIC Allowable Costs During a Pandemic

During a pandemic, if it is determined that masks and respirators are necessary for the safety and well-being of WIC Program employees and participants to conduct WIC Program operations, the cost of such items are allowed. Local Agencies must contact the State Agency prior to making any significant (over $500) pandemic related purchases with WIC funds. The State Agency will check with the USDA Regional office for guidance on the allowability of other disaster related items on a case-by-case basis, as not all pandemic-related safety items would be an allowable WIC cost.

Vendor Monitoring

Local Agencies can modify current monitoring & training schedules as necessary, during a pandemic. Local Agencies have until August 1st of each contract year to ensure compliance with program requirements and serve as a support resource. If the declaration of a pandemic will interfere with the monitoring of vendors prior to the August 1st deadline, please reach out to your State Agency Lead for additional guidance. Please review policy, VEN: 06.00.00 Vendor Monitoring, for additional information and guidance.
Appendix A
Flow Chart for Secondary Nutrition Education
What to do if client has RD, NE+, NEI appointment

Staff calls client
Order of preference for High Risk clients: RD, RN, Clerk

Staff speaks to client

- Go through “Disaster NEI” questions
- Move Trigger Topic and Disaster Topic
- Issue benefits to next cert (mark “not physically present” box)
- Provide disaster referrals as needed
- Document appointment as complete
- Schedule next appointment based on Flowsheet
- If staff is a Clerk, ask client, “Would you like our RN/RD to call you?”
- Mail client Benefit Balance, Appointment Letter and Diet Questionnaire

Staff does not speak to client

Leave message to have client call back

Client calls back

Clerk finds RD or RN to take call (if none available, Clerk speaks to client)

- Go through “Disaster NEI” questions
- Move Trigger Topic and Disaster Topic
- Issue benefits to next cert (mark “not physically present” box)
- Provide disaster referrals as needed
- Document appointment as complete
- Schedule next appointment based on Flowsheet
- If staff is a Clerk, ask client, “Would you like our RN/RD to call you?”
- Mail client Benefit Balance, Appointment Letter and Diet Questionnaire

Client never calls back

- Do not call client again
- Do not issue benefits

Note: If RD talks to client for RD appointment, still document under RD-Nutrition Ed link.
Appendix B
Disaster/Pandemic - Secondary Nutrition Education

In place of usual low risk and high-risk in person appointments, agencies may conduct all secondary nutrition education via phone. If LA chooses to conduct secondary nutrition education via phone, use the following guidance. Order of preference for High Risk clients: RD, RN, Clerk. See Flow Chart for process.

During the call it is encouraged to check on the client's/family well-being. Some of the following questions might be used.

All Clients
Review risk factors, prior nutrition education and nutrition goal/plan prior to call.

1. Do you have emergency food supplies on hand?
   a. If yes, for about how many days?
   b. If no, how do you plan to get food?
2. If you need more food, how do you plan to get it? (able to get to a store, someone is bringing food to you, we don’t have a way to get food)
3. Are your utilities working? (electricity, gas, other)
4. Do you have a safe water supply?
5. Do you have a working refrigerator?
6. Do you have a way to cook/heat food?

Other questions to consider asking
1. How are you feeling? Are you having any issues (especially nutrition issues)?
2. Are you having any issues with eating?
3. Do you feel safe?
4. How are you doing with your ________________ (nutrition goal/plan)? (use professional judgement if appropriate to ask)
5. What concerns or questions do you have?

Breastfeeding Women
1. Are you still breastfeeding?
   a. If yes, how is it going?

Infants
1. How is your infant tolerating breastmilk/formula?
2. If infant is on formula, what type of formula? If powder, how are you mixing? (If there any water issues, can issue RTF.)
3. Is your infant having any difficulties with eating/intake?

Based on information supplied, make referrals for any local services needed. (All LAs should create or modify their current referral list to include all disaster services available in the community, such as the local Red Cross, shelters nearby, food pantries or any food assistance available in addition to WIC, appropriate medical services during the disaster, etc.)

If a client is interested in additional nutrition education, refer to lessons on wichealth.org, The wichealth.org handout on the WIC website explains how to set up an account along with the list of lessons. There are several different lessons about food safety that might seem appropriate at this time.