

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants & Children (WIC) WIC Vendor Stakeholders Forum – September 20, 2016 & January 18, 2017

Summary

Vendor Peer Groups

- Vendor peer groups were implemented in June 2016.
- Criteria and maximum allowable pricing levels to ensure appropriate peer group placement will be reassessed on a quarterly basis.
- Not-to-Exceed (NTE) amounts for WIC products are evaluated according to vendor peer group and changed as needed, based on the most current data available.
- Vendors who believe their Vendor Peer Group is incorrect are encouraged to contact their VMA.

Electronic Vendor Monitoring

- Statewide implementation of eMonitoring occurred in the fall 2016. This has streamlined the vendor monitoring process.
- Immediately after a monitoring is complete the vendor will receive an electronic summary report via **email only**.
- Vendors must maintain an active email address in order to receive the electronic summary report (see Vendor Bulletin #8, dated August 5, 2016).
- Electronic summary reports will identify if the vendor passed or failed, details of any violations or findings, items requiring follow-up, and a price reasonableness calculation.

Vendor ListServ

- NYS is using a vendor listserv for all routine vendor correspondence.
- All authorized WIC vendors must have a current email address on file; more than one email is encouraged.
- ListServ emails will be sent from doh.sm.WIC.Vendors. This is an unmonitored mailbox. Do not reply to this email address.

Pictorial Foods Guide

- The Pictorial Foods Guide is a new resource that complements the current WIC Acceptable Foods Card.
- Vendors have received English copies from their VMA. Spanish copies are forthcoming.
- The Pictorial Foods Guide is currently available online and can be downloaded onto a smartphone in English and 20 other languages:
http://www.health.ny.gov/prevention/nutrition/wic/info_for_vendors.htm.

Acceptable Foods Card Training Module

- The Acceptable Foods Card Training Module is a resource to assist cashiers and vendor staff with identifying WIC eligible foods.
- The module is available at www.nyswicvendortraining.com. You will need your vendor ID number to access the training.

Infant Formula Wholesale Prices

- Effective February 1, 2017, the wholesale price of Similac Neosure increased.
- NYS WIC adjusted reimbursement amounts for this formula.

Status of NYWIC-eWIC Implementation

- In 2018, the NYS WIC Program will begin transitioning to an online electronic benefits transfer (EBT) system, called eWIC. The eWIC system will replace paper checks with a debit card for WIC foods benefits.
- NYWIC will be the new automated web-based system to replace the current system (WICSIS).
- Vendors will need either Integrated Electronic Cash Registers (IECR) or Stand-beside point-of-sale (POS) terminals.
- UPC collection has begun with submissions from manufacturers, distributors, and retailers. UPC field collection will take place from March-July 2017. These UPCs will make up the initial Authorized Product List (APL).
- eWIC cards will have a magnetic strip and will require participants to enter a PIN. After the eWIC card is swiped, the system will compare each food item to the APL to determine if it is allowable. Then each food item is compared to the participant's balance to determine if there is a sufficient balance to purchase foods.
- Communication and training will be crucial throughout this project. Please contact nyswic@health.ny.gov with questions or feedback.

State Regulatory Update

- In response to the feedback received during the public comment period and in conjunction with the changing needs of the program, NYS allowed the proposed changes to expire in September 2016.

Reminders

- The Cashier training module is available at www.nyswicvendortraining.com
- WIC vendor website is under development and will be available in 2017.
- Vendors should notify their VMA immediately if there are any changes to their email address.
- Vendor communications including upcoming WIC Vendor Forum Information will be shared through the Vendor Listserv.

Questions and Answers

Pictorial Foods Guide (PFG):

1. Q: When will the new Pictorial Foods Guide be available to vendors?

A: VMAs recently shipped copies of the PFG to all authorized WIC vendors. Vendors who have not received the PFG should contact their VMA. Vendors may also access the PFG online; the online version is in PDF format and is available in English and 20 other languages. To access the PFG online, visit https://www.health.ny.gov/prevention/nutrition/wic/info_for_vendors.htm

2. Q: How do vendors receive the Pictorial Foods Guide in Spanish? Do they have to request it?

A: The PFG will be translated into Spanish as part of the final distribution phase. Once complete, the Spanish version will be shipped to VMAs. VMAs will then send copies to vendors who serve Spanish speaking participants.

3. Q: Will the PFG need to be printed at the store level?

A: English copies have been distributed, and Spanish copies will be provided in the coming months. If vendors would like hard copies of the PFG in other languages, they can be printed

from the NYSDOH website at
https://www.health.ny.gov/prevention/nutrition/wic/info_for_vendors.htm

4. Q: Is the PFG available in Yiddish or Hebrew?

A: The PFG is available in Yiddish on the NYSDOH website.

eWIC-NYWIC

5. Q: What kind of cash register is needed for eWIC? How will a store know if their register qualifies?

A: If vendors plan to use an integrated cash register system for eWIC transactions, they will need to have a machine that is capable of reading a magnetic strip. NYS will collect the current cash register system information from all WIC vendors and provide a list of compatible systems for eWIC. In general, any system that is compatible with EMV (chip) technology will likely be able to read the magnetic strip on an eWIC card.

6. Q: Will specific needs or recommended systems that the retailers can use be posted? When will this information be available?

A: Yes, guidance on equipment will be provided when it becomes available.

7. Q: Will the eWIC cards use EMV?

A: No, the eWIC cards will have the traditional magnetic strip, not the chip.

8. Q: Will NYS WIC provide a standalone terminal for stores without integrated cash registers?

A: Yes, standalone terminals will be available through the eWIC contractor for stores without integrated cash registers. NYS WIC will provide additional information when it becomes available.

9. Q: Will a standalone terminal be efficient for eWIC?

A: Integrated cash register systems are preferred. Please note that vendors who use a standalone terminal to process SNAP transactions will need a second device for eWIC transactions.

10. Q: Will vendors receive help adding UPCs for WIC allowable products to their cash register systems?

A: UPC data for WIC authorized items will be included in the Authorized Products List (APL) that will be sent electronically by the eWIC contractor typically once per day.

11. Q: Will there still be an acceptable foods card once eWIC is live?

A: Yes, there will still be a list of approved foods that participants can select with the new eWIC card.

12. Q: Will the participant's name be printed on the eWIC card, and will participants still need a WIC ID?

A: No, participants will have a personal identification number (PIN) for their eWIC card and will no longer need a WIC ID card.

13. Q: Will participants be able to send anyone to the retailers to use their eWIC card?

A: Participants will have one card per family with one PIN assigned to it; they may share this card and PIN with whomever they trust.

14. Q: Will the eWIC card have a lump-sum value on it, like a SNAP card does?

A: No. An eWIC card is loaded with a prescription for specific food items, just like a paper WIC check. As participants use their benefits, food items are deleted from the balance on the eWIC card. At the end of each transaction, the POS system displays and prints an itemized list, so participants can see which foods they have left and how much time remains until their benefits expire. There will be a lump sum value for vegetables and fruits.

15. Q: If an item is WIC allowable but has not yet been added to the Authorized Product List, will vendors be able to override the system so the item can be purchased with WIC benefits?

A: No. However, NYS WIC is taking steps to minimize problems of this kind at checkout. NYS WIC has already collected more than 13,000 UPCs and is currently conducting field work to collect additional UPCs. Additionally, NYS WIC will create a tool so customers, vendors, distributors, and manufacturers can easily report new UPCs electronically. NYS WIC will also work with manufacturers to add UPCs to the APL before new WIC allowable products are released to the market. The APL will be updated and released to vendors at regular intervals (typically once per day).

16. Q: If a transaction contains one item that is not authorized, how will the eWIC system let vendors know? Will the entire transaction be declined?

A: At the time of purchase, participants will swipe their eWIC card and any acceptable items that are covered by their benefits will be deducted from their purchase. Participants can then use another form of payment (such as SNAP benefits, cash, or a credit card) to pay for the remaining items.

17. Q: With eWIC, will participants be allowed to get WIC allowable foods as needed, or do they have to get all items at the same time?

A: Participants will be able to shop for items when they need them and will not be required to get all items at once.

18. Q: If a customer needs to return an item, will the refund go on the eWIC card?

A: This has not yet been determined. Guidance on returns will be provided when it becomes available.

19. Q: Will there be a call line to honor purchases if the eWIC system is down or an eWIC card won't swipe?

A: This has not yet been determined. Guidance on how to handle these situations will be provided when it becomes available.

20. Q: Won't switching to EBT cards leave the program open to fraud? How will proper use be verified?

A: The new EBT cards will require participants to enter their PIN at the time of checkout, just like a normal debit card. NYSDOH, in collaboration with WIC providers, vendors, and participants, will continue to work diligently to combat fraud within the WIC program.

21. Q: If participants from the pilot area go to a store before it has been set up for eWIC, will the store be able to redeem their benefits?

A: Participants in the pilot area will be trained as to where they can shop with eWIC benefits.

22. Q: Will the application process for new stores to apply to become a WIC vendor be the same once eWIC is implemented?

A: Changes to the application process have not yet been determined. Additional guidance will be provided as it becomes available.

23. Q: How many states are currently using eWIC?

A: USDA has mandated that all states transition to WIC electronic benefits transfer by 2020. Currently, eWIC has been fully implemented in Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nevada, New Mexico, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. In order to ensure a smooth transition to eWIC, NYS WIC has reached out to several of these states for advice.

WIC Checks

24. Q: Why are the Not to Exceed (NTE) amounts no longer printed on the checks?

A: In 2014, a USDA evaluation of the NYS WIC program found that the existing cost containment system was inadequate. Printing the NTE on the check resulted in some vendors charging higher prices, so NYS WIC implemented the required cost containment changes, which included removing the NTEs from all WIC checks except for the Cash Value Vouchers (CVV).

25. Q: Is there a system in place for WIC vendors not to be charged bounced check fees from their bank of deposit?

A: No, there is no system in place. However, NYS has observed that many check rejections are the result of vendor errors in processing WIC checks. Ensure that cashiers are properly trained so that during checkout, they always confirm that the product and quantity being purchased is what is actually listed on the check. Dollar values for cash value voucher fruit and vegetable checks continue to be printed on the checks. In addition, vendors can minimize rejections by ensuring that checks are properly signed and dated and submitted for reimbursement within the required timeframes. Training resources are available at www.nyswicvendortraining.com.

26. Q: Why do checks that exceed the NTE have to bounce? Can't NYS WIC debit any excess charges from vendors' bank accounts instead?

A: The banking process does not allow this mechanism.

27. Q: How should checks for Similac Alimentum 16 oz. containers be filled now that the container size has been changed to 12 oz.?

A: The packaging size change is a known issue. Only provide participants with the size and quantity of products that are listed on their checks. The checks for 16 oz. Similac Alimentum have not been printed since July, so there should no longer be checks for 16 oz. Similac Alimentum; only the 12.1 oz. Similac Alimentum is issued now.

28. Q: If customers want to “pay the difference” on vegetables and fruits checks (cash value vouchers), can they do so with any form of payment?

A: Yes. Customers can make up the difference with any form of payment, including SNAP benefits, cash, a debit or credit card, etc. Please remind cashiers that they should never write in a “pay exactly” amount greater than the not-to-exceed amount (usually \$8.00 or \$11.00) printed on each vegetables and fruits check. (For example: If a participant has a vegetables and fruits check with an NTE of \$11.00 and wishes to purchase fruits and/or vegetables valued at \$12.50, the cashier should write \$11.00 in the “pay exactly” box on the check. The participant may pay the remaining \$1.50 with other funds.) Training resources are available at www.nyswicvendortraining.com.

29. Q: If vendors notice that a participant has entered the date in the incorrect format, can they change it?

A: No. Only the participant may correct the date and must do so at the time of the transaction. Please remind cashiers to review checks thoroughly before concluding each WIC transaction. If the cashier finds that the date is incorrectly formatted, the cashier should ask the participant to put a single line through the incorrectly formatted date, initial next to the error, and write the date in the correct format. Training resources are available at www.nyswicvendortraining.com.

Price Evaluation

30. Q: Is there a website or handout where vendors can find NTEs for WIC foods and formulas?

A: NYS WIC notified each vendor of average redemption values by vendor peer group for commonly redeemed WIC items in March 2017.

31. Q: Is there a pricing range for Exempt Formulas available for vendors who are approved to sell these formulas to base their prices off of?

A: VMAs can assist individual vendors in determining whether their prices for these products are reasonable.

32. Q: Now that the mandatory minimum wage increase has gone into effect, will NTEs be adjusted to accommodate higher operating costs for vendors?

A: NYS WIC calculates NTEs based on average prices for each peer group. NYS WIC compares NTEs against actual shelf prices collected via e-monitoring and adjusts accordingly.

33. Q: If vendors receive a “high priced” alert on a monitoring, how do they find out what items are affected? Do they have to lower their prices?

A: The VMA will discuss the high priced alert with the vendor at the time of the monitoring. If vendors have additional questions about high priced items, they should contact their VMA.

34. Q: How can vendors contact VMAs for pricing guidance?

A: VMA telephone numbers and email addresses are available at https://www.health.ny.gov/prevention/nutrition/wic/vendor_management_agencies_contact.htm. Vendors are encouraged to establish a relationship with their VMA.

Acceptable Foods Card

35. Q: Does NYS WIC allow organic vegetables and fruits?

A: Yes, organic vegetables and fruits are allowed. However, please be aware that each category of WIC foods is subject to different rules, and many WIC food categories do not allow organic items. (For example, organic beans and yogurt are allowed, but organic cheese, milk, eggs, and peanut butter are not. Please consult the WIC Acceptable Foods Card or Pictorial Foods Guide for additional details.)

36. Q: Are 15.5-ounce cans of beans allowable?

A: Yes. As shown on the WIC Acceptable Foods Card, the required size is “15-16 ounces.” This means that 15-ounce, 15.5-ounce, and 16-ounce cans of beans are all allowed, provided that they meet the other requirements for the food category.

37. Q: If vendors are out of 1-pound loaves of bread, can they offer a participant a 1.1- or 1.2-pound loaf instead?

A: No. WIC bread is a quantity- and brand-specific category. This means that the participant must choose a type and size of bread listed on the WIC Acceptable Foods Card. If none of the listed brands are available, vendors may offer a participant another item from the whole grains category, such as whole grain tortillas, brown rice, or whole wheat pasta. Please note, however, that the participant is not required to accept one of these alternate items and may choose to redeem their WIC check at a different store. Additionally, vendors may not offer a participant an “IOU” for an item that is not currently available.

38. Q: Why are 6-packs of 8-ounce ready-to-use Pediasure only allowable at WIC pharmacies or grocery stores approved to accept exempt formula checks?

A: Please consult NYS WIC Vendor Bulletin # 5, dated April 18, 2016.

39. Q: If vendors do not have 16-ounce juice concentrate in stock, can they substitute 11.5-12-ounce juice concentrate instead?

A: No. These products cannot be substituted for each other.

40. Q: Does NYS WIC allow frozen yucca?

A: Yes. Participants may purchase frozen yucca with their vegetables and fruits checks.

41. Q. Do canned gandules peas (pigeon peas) count as vegetables or beans?

A: Gandules peas should be treated as beans.

Similac Neosure

42. Q: Will vendors be notified when the wholesale price increase for Similac Neosure goes into effect?

A: Abbott Labs sent notification out to the retail community regarding the wholesale price increase for Similac Neosure.

43. Q: Is Similac Neosure part of the minimum stock requirement?

A: No. Vendors are not required to carry Similac Neosure.

E-Monitoring

44. Q: For e-monitoring, how long after the monitoring visit will the vendor receive the report?

A: The e-monitoring report is emailed immediately after the monitoring is completed.

Shelf Talkers

45. Q: When will universal shelf talkers be created and issued? In the meantime, can vendors create their own shelf talkers?

A: NYS WIC will develop a standard shelf talker to be used throughout NYS after NYWIC/eWIC is implemented. Due to time constraints required for NYWIC/eWIC implementation, NYS is not accepting new requests to review shelf talkers at this time.

Proposed State Regulations

46. Q: Can NYS WIC provide clarification on the expiring proposed regulations, which is in regards to the proposed changes to vendor enrollment?

A: NYS WIC only had one set of proposed regulations so the entire package that was proposed expired in September 2016.

WIC Vendors

47. Q: What is the percent decline in NYS WIC vendors from last year?

A: There was a 9.5% decrease in the number of WIC vendors from August 2015 to August 2016.

Vendor ListServ

48. Q: How do vendors sign up for the Vendor ListServ?

A: Every authorized WIC vendor, as well as participants who have registered for past and present WIC Vendor webinars, will be added to the ListServ. If vendors are already getting emails from NYS WIC, they will be automatically added to the ListServ.

49. Q: Will non-vendors be permitted to register on the Vendor ListServ?

A: Yes, non-vendors may register as long as their connection to the WIC Program and/or vendor community is indicated when requesting to register.

50. Q: How does a non-vendor register for the ListServ?

A: Please register with the VMA. All registered webinar participants are automatically added to the ListServ.

51. Q: How can a vendor make sure their email address is correct on the Vendor ListServ?

A: Please contact your VMA to register your email to the ListServ.

WIC Vendor Forums

52. Q: When will the next WIC forums be held?

A: The next forum will be on Wednesday, April 19, at 11:00 AM. Tentative dates for subsequent webinars are Tuesday, July 11, at 2:00 PM and Tuesday, October 17, at 11:00 AM.