



## **WIC Service Flexibilities Extended Due to Coronavirus Pandemic**

USDA has extended WIC COVID-19 flexibilities allowing WIC to serve families remotely during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Release & Contact Info

### **Press Release**

**Contact:** Lauren Brand

**Email:** [wicassociationofnys@gmail.com](mailto:wicassociationofnys@gmail.com)

**(Albany, NY, November 6, 2020)** –Thanks to extended flexibilities in federal rules, close to 400,000 New Yorkers will continue to receive critical support remotely through the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, known as WIC. The WIC program provides access to healthy foods as well as nutritional counseling and breastfeeding support to pregnant, breastfeeding, and postpartum women and children up to age five. Additionally, WIC clinics function as community centers and resource brokers for young families, connecting parents and children with early intervention, mental health and countless other supports.

New York State has made maximum use of existing program flexibilities to make it as easy as possible for children and families to participate in WIC during the COVID-19 health emergency. Specifically, clinics may serve participants remotely via telephone, text or videoconference, and remotely load WIC benefits onto eWIC cards.

Local providers are able to maintain full operations supporting current participants and enroll new families. As the impact of the pandemic continues, more families may now be income-eligible and are strongly encouraged to apply.

After the start of the pandemic, WIC agencies moved as quickly as allowed to continue to serve families while keeping both families and WIC staff safe. WIC directors from around New York State report that delivering WIC services remotely has been very well-received by participants, and due to the economic impacts of the pandemic, WIC agencies have seen higher participation among families. “No one should have to choose between having enough to eat and risking health having to travel to and from the WIC clinic. These waivers allow our clinics to be truly participant-centered and make it easy and safe for WIC participants to receive vital nutrition services. All families whose income has been affected during this period should absolutely apply for WIC.” said Helene Rosenhouse-Romeo, Director of WIC and Nutrition at Ryan Health Network in NYC. “We want to remind community partners and families that WIC is here for everyone, regardless of immigration status, and that many more New Yorkers could participate. Dads, grandparents, step-parents, guardians, and foster parents can apply, too, for WIC on behalf of the children in their care. Even families already receiving support from foster care, medical

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1971 Western Avenue, PO Box 1155 Albany, NY 12203 – [wicassociationofnys@gmail.com](mailto:wicassociationofnys@gmail.com)

assistance, or SNAP may be eligible.” said Lauren Brand, WIC Director of the Stony Brook WIC Program in Suffolk County and chairperson of the WIC Association of NYS.

New Yorkers can connect with WIC by calling the Growing Up Healthy Hotline at 1-800-522-5006 and ask for help with WIC, or see this list of local [WIC Clinics](#).

### **Background:**

On September 21<sup>st</sup>, the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced they would extend waivers that allow for more flexibility during the COVID-19 pandemic until thirty days after the end of the nationally-declared public health emergency. Without the action, these essential flexibilities would have expired at the end of September.

By law, the Secretary of Health and Human Services must renew the declaration every ninety days for flexibilities to remain active. The renewal made earlier in October took effect on October 23 and can be further renewed before January 21, 2021. With this decision, WIC flexibilities are now in place through at least February 20, 2021. States are also allowed flexibility in the WIC food package in case of supply or shortage issues.

Shortly after the US Department of Agriculture announced the extension of the waivers, the House of Representatives advanced a continuing resolution to fund the federal government through December 11<sup>th</sup>, which was approved by the Senate and signed by the President on September 30<sup>th</sup>. The continuing resolution also included the authority for the USDA to extend WIC waivers through September 2021. The additional authority provided by the continuing resolution provides greater flexibility, as USDA can now approve new waivers and issue additional extensions should the public health emergency declaration prematurely expire.

The WIC Association of New York State, Inc. is the leading organization supporting and enhancing the services of the WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) Program and its direction for the future. Learn more at [nyswica.org](http://nyswica.org).

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