



## WIC: USDA Waivers in Response to COVID-19

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has enabled the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) to request waivers that grant flexibilities and contingencies based on the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. These waivers support WIC agencies in maintaining safe access to food benefits, nutrition and breastfeeding support, and referrals to services for women, infants, and children during the COVID-19 public health emergency.

Below is a list of active waivers that have been extended until 30 days after the end of the nationally declared public health emergency.

- **Transaction Without Presence of Cashier Waiver:** Allows participants to make WIC purchases without being in the presence of a cashier. This allows participants to use online ordering and curbside pickup options offered by WIC-authorized retailers.
- **Physical Presence Waiver:** Allows participants to enroll and re-enroll in WIC without visiting a WIC clinic. This includes the ability to defer anthropomorphic and bloodwork requirements necessary to determine nutritional risk for the period of the physical presence waiver. (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/disaster/pandemic/covid-19/wic-physical-presence-waiver>)
- **Remote Benefit Issuance Waiver:** Allows participants to receive WIC benefits remotely, without coming into the WIC clinic. (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/disaster/pandemic/covid-19/wic-remote-benefit-issuance-waiver>)
- **Separation of Duties Waiver:** Allows for a single WIC staff member to determine eligibility for all certification criteria and issue food benefits to a participant, whereas multiple staff members were previously required.
- **Extended Certification Periods Waiver:** Allows WIC agencies to extend certifications periods for *certain* participants beyond the existing regulatory limit of 30 days.
- **Medical Documentation Waiver:** Allows WIC agencies to extend **existing** benefits to supplemental foods for qualifying conditions beyond the previous two-month time limit without additional medical documentation.
- **Local Agency Monitoring Waiver:** Allows State agencies to conduct virtual local agency monitoring reviews via a desk audit or other means.
- **Vendor Pre-Authorization Visits Waiver:** Allows State agencies to temporarily authorize vendors without conducting an onsite visit prior to or at the time of the vendor's initial authorization by postponing the onsite visit to within 90 days of state and local social distancing orders being lifted.

- **Extended Benefits Issuance Waiver:** Allows WIC agencies to issue up to four months of benefits to participants at a time that reduces the need for contact with WIC staff. (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/covid-19/extended-benefits-issuance-waivers>)
- **Non-Retail Two-Month Issuance Waiver:** Allows WIC agencies to distribute a two-month supply of non-retail, supplemental foods (such as exempt infant formula) instead of the previously mandated one-month limit.
- **Food Package Substitution Waivers:** Allows WIC agencies to make appropriate substitutions for unavailable WIC food package items. Allows state agencies to change approved-foods lists as needed. (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/food-package-substitution-waiver>)
- **Minimum Stocking Requirements Waiver:** Provides authorized WIC vendors additional flexibilities in the quantity and type of WIC-approved foods that vendors must stock. (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/covid-19/wic-minimum-stock-waiver>)

What follows is a list of waivers expiring on or before September 30, 2020.

- **Vendor Agreement Extension:** Allows State agencies to postpone some vendor reauthorization actions by extending expiring vendor agreements for a period of up to one year beyond the current three-year agreement time limit.
- **Vendor Compliance Investigations Waiver:** Allows for cessation of onsite vendor monitoring reviews that investigate compliance throughout the waiver period, but does not waive the requirement to investigate a minimum of 5 percent of WIC-authorized vendors each fiscal year.
- **Vendor Routine Monitoring:** Allows for cessation of onsite routine monitoring visits to vendors throughout the waiver period, but does not waive the requirement for State agencies to conduct routine monitoring visits on a minimum of 5 percent of their WIC-authorized vendors each fiscal year.

The USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) is providing up to \$500 million in additional funding, available through September 30, 2021, to cover increases in WIC participation.

#### Take Action:

- Advocates, other partners, and State agency staff can work in partnership to make sure WIC continues to reach and serve families. Please see FRAC's [Maximize WIC's Role in Supporting Health, Food Security, and Safety During the COVID 19 Pandemic: Opportunities for Action](#).
- No new waivers can be granted after September 30, 2020. View USDA's map of WIC waivers by state to maximize the number of waivers obtained before this time. (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/disaster/pandemic/covid-19/wic-waivers-flexibilities>).

For updates and additional information on COVID-19, please see [FRAC's website](#) (<https://frac.org/COVID-19-updates>).