

2021 Required WIC Vendor Training

Introduction

Welcome to the WIC training module for MN WIC Authorized Vendors. This is the 2021 Required Interactive Training that we hold every three years. This training should be completed by a customer service manager, head cashier, or someone who is responsible for training other employees and conducting day-to-day operations related to WIC. At the end of this module, you will need to fill out a survey with your store information to get credit for completing the module. If you do not complete the survey, you will not get credit for completing this training.

Training Agenda

We'll start by going over a brief program overview and talking about some of our program rules. Then we will give some transaction tips and go over some troubleshooting basics. Lastly, we will focus on providing great customer service.

WIC Materials and Resources for Vendors

Since you are probably already familiar with WIC, this training will not go into as much detail about definitions of WIC terminology, WIC Foods, WIC Transactions, or troubleshooting tips. If you would like a review of those topics, please view the materials listed on this slide and return to this module to finish the training. Please click the "next" button to progress to the next slide.

WIC Program Overview

We'll start with a brief overview of the WIC program.

What is WIC?

WIC is a public health nutrition program. We focus on the prevention of common deficiencies and disease states by promoting good nutrition and healthy behaviors. WIC serves pregnant, breastfeeding, and post-partum women, as well as their infants and children up to five years of age. In order to receive WIC benefits, participants must meet residency and income guidelines.

Program Benefits

As part of our program, WIC participants receive nutrition education, breastfeeding guidance and support, referrals to other services, and benefits for supplemental healthy foods, which is where the vendors come into play. Because WIC is a public health nutrition program, we have certain restrictions on what foods can be purchased with WIC benefits, as well as requirements around what stores must carry so they can always serve our vulnerable population. You'll hear more about these shortly.

Role of WIC Authorized Vendor Employees

As a WIC authorized vendor employee, you are responsible for following all rules governing the program. You are expected to transact WIC cards when they are presented at your store. It's also important to treat WIC participants the same as you treat other customers. Lastly, make sure you understand any changes or information that may impact WIC at your store by reading all the communications that comes from our office and responding in a timely manner, if your response is requested.

Check Your Knowledge

Check your knowledge with this true or false question. WIC Provides all the foods that a participating family will need in a month. True or False?

- A)
- B)

Check Your Knowledge

Check your knowledge with this multiple-choice question. Which of the following things control what foods can be purchased with the WIC card? A. The Approved Product List or APL, B. Your integrated POS system or WIC stand beside terminal, C. The WIC card, or D. All of the above?

- A)
- B)
- C)
- D)

WIC Program Rules for Authorized Vendors

Now we'll move on to basic WIC rules and requirements for all WIC vendors.

WIC Shopping Guide

Even though the POS system or Stand-Beside terminal controls what products customers can buy, the Shopping Guide is still an essential tool, because it is the only place that lists allowable brands and sizes of products. Most WIC foods must meet a nutritional requirement as well as a size and/or brand requirement, so it can be easy to mistake a food that is not allowed for one that is. The shopping guide should be used to troubleshoot when foods don't ring up as WIC allowed and to help customers find the right foods. You can find a copy of the Shopping Guide at the link on this slide.

My Minnesota WIC App

The My Minnesota WIC App for smartphones can help both store staff and participants determine if a food is WIC allowed by scanning UPCs. When a participant registers the card with the app, they get a wider availability of options within the app, one of which allows them to view their current benefit balance. The Food Finder portion of the app can be used to determine if a food is WIC-allowed, but it won't adjust to show the available benefit balance unless a card is registered with the app. This can be a good tool for WIC authorized stores to determine what is WIC allowed, although it won't be specific to a participant's benefit balance.

The Approved Product List (APL)

Even though it's a fairly basic concept, we'll review the Approved Product List or APL. The APL is a categorized list of all WIC-allowed UPCs. In the eWIC system, WIC benefits are assigned to a participant's card, and these benefits correspond to the food categories in the APL and Shopping Guide. Your integrated POS or WIC stand-beside terminal is programmed to know what benefits are available on the card and what foods are allowed to be purchased. If a food's UPC is in the APL file and the participant has benefits available for the item, they can purchase it with the WIC card. If the UPC is not in the APL, or if they don't have benefits for that kind of item, they cannot purchase it with the WIC card. There is no way to override the WIC card or APL. You may have seen this example with whole milk - the UPCs are in the APL, but they are a category that is only assigned to one-year-olds. If your POS system or stand-beside terminal is functioning properly, the APL should update automatically every day. Because the WIC Program adds foods to the program on a continuous basis, the APL needs to update to be consistent with the foods that have been added. Note that an out-of-date APL can cause errors preventing WIC participants from being able to complete a WIC transaction or buy items they are allowed to buy. If you're having issues with your integrated POS system, reach out to your corporate office or the company that services your POS system. Stores with stand-beside terminals should reach out directly to FIS.

Mapping Fresh Produce in Integrated Stores

Minnesota WIC cannot track all fresh produce UPCs, so all WIC authorized stores are expected to map fresh produce with UPCs to a like PLU. Minnesota WIC provides a list of PLUs in our APL, so that stores or corporate offices may link or map those UPCs. If produce mapping is not done at the store, the item may not ring up in the WIC transaction, and the WIC customer may not be able to purchase that item on their shopping trip to your store. Because the procedure for mapping fresh produce varies depending on the POS system, it is best to reach out to your POS provided with questions about mapping. Also, because Minnesota WIC does not keep most fresh produce UPCs in the APL, they are also not accurate for scanning in the My Minnesota WIC App. WIC does not recommend scanning fresh produce UPCs in the WIC app, because they will typically show as not allowed, when in fact, most fresh produce items are allowed for WIC, and it is the store's mapping that allows them to scan in the system.

Minimum Stock Requirements

The next basic rule is that WIC Vendors must meet Minimum Stock Requirements at all times. The minimum stock requirements help ensure that you are always able to provide allowed foods to a WIC customer. You can find the minimum stock requirements on the Minnesota WIC Vendor Website by clicking the link on this slide. Note that there are some WIC allowed items, such as infant meats or lactose free milk, that don't need to be carried at all times, but you do need to make them available to a customer within seven days of a request. It's important for all WIC Vendors and applicants to know that failure to meet Minimum Stock Requirements may result in the termination of your WIC Vendor Agreement or your Application for WIC Vendor Authorization.

Why?

Why is it important? Minimum stock ensures that a WIC participant will be able to purchase WIC benefits at your store at any given time.

Can a Food That is Not in the APL Count Toward Minimum Stock?

Here's a good question: Can a food that is not in the APL count toward a store's minimum stock? It depends. For all products outside fresh produce, the answer is "no". For Fresh Fruits & Vegetables, the answer is "yes," since MN WIC doesn't add all fresh produce UPCs to the APL. Because fresh fruit and vegetable UPCs are not in the APL but are almost always WIC-allowed items, they count towards minimum stock. Note that in order for fresh produce to scan for WIC, the items have to be mapped in an integrated system. All produce, whether fresh or frozen is entered in dollar amounts in the stand-beside terminal.

What To Do?

If you are unsure if a product is WIC allowed, there are a few ways to find out. You can use the Food Finder in the My Minnesota WIC app to scan UPCs. You can also review the Minnesota WIC Shopping Guide or check the APL, which can be located on the Minnesota WIC Vendor website. If you are still unsure if an item is WIC allowed, contact the Minnesota WIC Program with questions. It's always good to know if a food item is WIC-allowed, especially before bringing it into your store for purchase. Installing the My Minnesota WIC app and scanning items may be the quickest and most fool-proof way to determine if a food at your store can be sold for WIC.

Invoices and Purchase Records

In addition to meeting minimum stock requirements, all WIC vendors are required to maintain the most recent three years of invoices or stock purchase records and must provide them when requested by Minnesota WIC staff. Additionally, the most recent three months' worth of invoices must be kept at the address on your store's vendor application. These records must be kept in date order. Receipts must be photocopied to maintain their integrity. Failure to comply with these rules, or to produce these records when requested by Minnesota WIC may result in the termination of your store's WIC vendor agreement.

Transporting Dairy and Eggs

The next important rule is that dairy foods, including milk, yogurt, cheese, and eggs must be kept cold while in transit during delivery. This rule is applicable to all stores, but most important for those that pick up these items from a distributor rather than having it delivered to the store. In order to comply with this rule, dairy foods must be transported in a refrigerated vehicle or in a cold cooler. If you use a cooler to transport dairy foods, the best practice is to keep it in your freezer when it is not in use, so it's always cold and ready to transport foods safely.

Price Guidelines

Minnesota WIC has certain price guidelines that apply to all WIC vendors. There are Maximum Prices to ensure that WIC vendors charge fair and competitive prices. These maximum prices are calculated based on prices at each retailer. Minnesota WIC does not publish these prices, but it is important to know that they can vary slightly by the size, type, and location of the vendor.

Price Guidelines

WIC Vendors must post prices of WIC foods in close proximity to the item so that it's easy for customers to tell how much a WIC food costs. WIC Vendors must charge the same price to WIC customers as they would to any other customer, regardless of payment type. Lastly, if a retail price is higher than the maximum price of a WIC allowed food, the WIC system will adjust the amount that the vendor is reimbursed, so they receive the maximum amount. Cashiers may never ask the WIC customer to pay the amount over the maximum price.

Incentives

While we're on the topic of price, let's cover rules around incentives. First, WIC vendors may not target WIC customers by offering them exclusive deals for using their WIC cards in the store. Any incentive given to a WIC customer must be available to all customers. For example, it's ok to offer a deal where customers buy two boxes of cereal and get a third free. It's not ok to offer a deal offering a free package of diapers when customers use the WIC card in your store. Second, any incentive on a qualifying WIC item must also be made available to WIC customers. Charging WIC customers the full price, while customers paying another way get a cheaper price, is considered "over-charging" and is a violation of WIC program rules. Lastly stores must allow WIC customers to apply coupons, deals, or loyalty cards to WIC purchases, if your store accepts these.

What Does That Mean?

For integrated vendors, if a sale price or deal is set up, it must be set up for WIC customers, as well. For example, if an item is buy- one, get- one free, the WIC customer must also receive the free item in that special. If a deal is set on spending a certain dollar amount in store to receive an incentive, the WIC customer must also receive that incentive item. Stand-beside vendors must modify prices to meet any sale prices they may post.

Infant Formula Requirements

The next basic rule is that Infant formula may only be purchased from a WIC Authorized Infant Formula Wholesaler. A list of authorized wholesalers and retailers can be found by clicking the link on this slide. Infant formula purchased from a non-authorized source may be stolen or may have been subject to tampering and is considered unsafe to feed to infants. Additionally, WIC vendors may only provide the exact infant formula or medical formula available to the WIC customer. It is against WIC rules to substitute another kind of formula or to exchange a formula purchased with WIC benefits for another kind of formula. This applies to all types of formula provided by the WIC program. WIC Vendors who violate rules related to infant formula are subject to termination from the program.

Medical Formulas

Let's touch briefly on the WIC medical formulas. These formulas are provided to women and children with specific medical needs. Some of them, like Pediasure, Alimentum, and Neosure, are widely available in grocery stores. Others, like Elecare, Neocate, Pediasure Enteral, and many other less common items can be ordered through the pharmacy.

Ordering Medical Formula

Most pharmacies in large stores must accept WIC benefits for medical formula, if they can order them from their supplier. Some exceptions exist. If you aren't sure whether or not the pharmacy located within your store accepts WIC benefits, contact the Minnesota WIC office. Minnesota WIC has created a guide to help ensure that pharmacy or grocery staff order and sell the correct medical formula. You can find it by clicking the link on this slide. It's important to order the right formula, because the WIC card will not pay for any non-approved formula. The most common issue we hear of is with Pediasure. Many grocery stores have several varieties of Pediasure readily available on the shelf, and it's important to know that there are nutritional differences between them. If the benefit balance lists "Pediasure Grow & Gain" the card will not pay for Pediasure Grow & Gain with Fiber, or vice versa. As part of the requirements in passing along this training information to other employees in your store, you must also pass along the information about providing medical formula for WIC participants to the staff working in your store's pharmacy.

Substitutions, Exchanges, and Refunds

Let's switch gears and talk about substitutions, Exchanges, and Refunds. The only time WIC vendors may offer to exchange a food purchased with WIC benefits is if it is spoiled or expired. If that happens, they may exchange for one of the same exact items that is still good. Keep in mind that WIC authorized vendors may not provide non-WIC Foods in exchange for WIC benefits. They may not exchange a previously purchased WIC food for a non-WIC food, a different food, cash, or store credit. They may not offer an IOU or store credit in exchange for WIC benefits. And they may not scan a barcode on one item and let the customer take another OR scan bar codes kept on a cheat sheet at the register.

Store Employee Training

Now we'll cover requirements for store employee training. In order to meet requirements around customer service and ability to transact WIC benefits, Owners and Managers of WIC authorized stores are responsible for training cashiers on WIC transactions (including a Balance Inquiry, WIC Purchase, and the Void(s) applicable to your POS system), basic information about the WIC allowed foods and how to use the WIC shopping guide, basic troubleshooting to help WIC customers (like reading a benefit balance and comparing it to the items being purchased, reporting un-mapped produce so it can be mapped to a WIC allowed PLU, and understanding where your store's WIC allowed formulas are located. It's also important for store employees to have a basic understanding of the My Minnesota WIC app, including the fact that customers must have the card number registered in order to be accurate. Store owners or managers will be held liable for any violations that occur as a result of inadequate employee training.

Maintenance of POS or Terminal

A new requirement since the eWIC rollout is that all authorized vendors must be enabled to transact WIC cards, either with their integrated POS system or with a stand-beside terminal. Minnesota WIC staff understand that glitches and configuration issues can occasionally prevent a store from being able to transact WIC cards, but vendors are expected to take necessary steps to get their systems up and running in a reasonable period of time. This is especially important in areas where a store may be the only WIC authorized store for five or more miles. Failure to resolve these issues in a timely manner may result in sanctions or termination of the WIC Vendor Agreement.

Non-Discrimination

The last basic rule is very important. Compliance with the non-discrimination provisions of the federal regulations is mandatory. Federal law prohibits any kind of discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, sex, or disability. It is also against WIC rules to treat customers differently based on their use of WIC benefits.

That Sounds Serious! What Does It Mean?

This means that you should treat customers paying with a WIC card with the same courtesy and respect that you would treat all customers. For example, help them try to figure out why an item they want to buy is not being deducted from the WIC card balance by reviewing the card's beginning balance and comparing it with the item, the shopping guide or the My MN WIC App. If you see that they selected an item that is not allowed for them, offer to help them find something that is allowed. Don't identify a customer as a WIC participant. If you need help from another employee, you can simply state, "I need help with a complicated transaction." And if the transaction is very difficult, or a number of items that the participant expected to pay for with the WIC card are not ringing up as WIC allowed, keep in mind that this may be very stressful. Consider how you might feel if you were trying to make healthy choices for your family, but your form of payment didn't work as expected. Your kindness and patience will go a long way.

Vendor Sanctions

As a reminder, WIC Authorized vendors are governed by state and federal rules. Failure to comply with these rules may result in disqualification, contract termination, monetary penalties, or criminal prosecution. After a vendor's successful authorization, MN WIC will continue to monitor stores to ensure that WIC authorized vendors comply with our rules. Details regarding violations and their penalties will be listed in your store's WIC authorized vendor agreement.

WIC Customer Treated You Unfairly?

We all have bad days, but if a WIC participant is being rude to store staff, you have a right to report that issue. Having as much information as possible about what happened helps the Minnesota WIC Program research your complaint and take any necessary action. You may find the formal complaint report on our website at the link on this slide.

Check Your Knowledge

Check your knowledge with this multiple-choice question. Which of the following things control what foods can be purchased with the WIC card? A. The Approved Product List or APL, B. Your integrated POS system or WIC stand beside terminal, C. The WIC card, or D. All of the above?

- A)
- B)
- C)
- D)

Check Your Knowledge

Check your knowledge with this multiple-choice question. If a WIC participant has questions about what benefits are on the card, you can do which of these to help? A. Perform a Balance Inquiry for them, so they can read their benefit balance, B. Shrug and say you don't know how to help them, C. Encourage them to get the My Minnesota WIC app and register their card to view their benefit balance or D. Both A and C.

- A)
- B)
- C)
- D)

Module Complete

This concludes this 2021 required Minnesota WIC vendor training. In order to get credit for completing the module, please click the store survey button on this page to submit your store information. Once you have opened the survey button, you may close this module. Thank you for your partnership in serving Minnesota WIC families!