



# Operation Food Search

## COVID-19 Related Guidance

### Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children provides food assistance, nutrition education, and health care referrals for pregnant women, new mothers, infants, and children. In order to adapt during the COVID-19 emergency, the state and local WIC agencies may implement flexibilities to better assist and protect the health of WIC families.

#### Program Overview

Topic	Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)										
<b>MO Department Administration</b>	Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS)										
<b>Eligibility</b>	<p>Must be a Missouri resident and meet categorical eligibility, nutrition, and income guidelines.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Qualifying applicants include: pregnant women, women breastfeeding, postpartum women up to 6 months after delivery or end of pregnancy, infants up to 1st birthday, children until their 5th birthday.</li> <li>2. Must have evidence of nutritional risk.</li> <li>3. Gross income has to be under 185% of Federal Poverty Level. Families using SNAP or TANF automatically qualify.</li> </ol> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Family Size</th> <th>Annual Income Limit</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>\$23,107</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2</td> <td>\$31,284</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3</td> <td>\$39,461</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4</td> <td>\$47,638</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Family Size	Annual Income Limit	1	\$23,107	2	\$31,284	3	\$39,461	4	\$47,638
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<b>Application Process</b>	To apply for benefits, individuals should contact a local WIC agency to schedule an appointment. <a href="#">View this map</a> to find an office near you or contact 1-800-835-5465 for assistance.										
<b>Benefits</b>	<p>WIC provides supplemental food, nutrition education, breastfeeding promotion and support, and referrals to health care. For information about food benefits, reference this complete list of <a href="#">WIC-approved foods</a>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WIC encourages and provides support for breastfeeding. For babies who are not fully breastfed, iron fortified infant formula can be provided.</li> <li>• At six (6) months of age, infants may receive infant cereal, fruit, and vegetables. Infants who are fully breastfed also receive infant meat.</li> </ul>										

Topic	Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women and children can receive fruits and vegetables, whole grain bread, whole wheat pasta, brown rice, oatmeal, milk, yogurt, eggs, beans, peanut butter, cereal.</li> <li>• Women who fully breastfeed their babies may also receive extra food including canned tuna, salmon, or sardines.</li> <li>• Women, infants, and children who have certain medical conditions may also be provided additional nutritional resources.</li> </ul>
<b>Where can WIC be used?</b>	Benefits can be used at <a href="#">authorized WIC stores</a> . All participating stores should have a <a href="#">sign at their entrance</a> and signs on approved food items throughout the store.
<b>Contact Information</b>	DHSS, WIC and Nutrition Services: 1-800-835-5465

## Questions & Answers

### **Can WIC applications and verification documents be completed without going in-person into a local WIC office?**

Yes. In order to support social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic, WIC applications and verification documents may now be submitted electronically. Please [contact your local WIC office](#) for specific details on how to submit an application.

### **Are WIC local agencies open throughout the state?**

Yes. Local agencies and hours of operation can be found [on this statewide map](#). Individuals should call to make an appointment based on the office's availability.

### **How will WIC families receive their benefits during the COVID-19 emergency?**

Statewide guidance has not been issued to change the process for receiving WIC benefits during COVID-19. Normal process requires participants to visit a local WIC store to receive benefits. Individuals should call their local WIC agencies to determine if they are alternative methods such as curbside pickup.

Although not yet implemented in Missouri, WIC can provide up to 3 months of benefits in advance and has the ability to mail checks and vouchers to participants. Benefits can be automatically loaded onto electronic benefit transfer (EBT) cards for participants who have been [transitioned to eWIC in central Missouri](#).

### **Can a participant designate someone else to pick up food at the grocery store if they are under a COVID-19 voluntary quarantine?**

Yes. Participants may designate a "Proxy" to go the grocery store for them. A proxy may be assigned during the certification process by making the request in-person or in writing to the local WIC agency.

## **What happens if food supplies become limited due to the COVID-19 emergency and WIC-approved food becomes more difficult or impossible to get at the grocery store?**

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) accepts waivers from states to allow for substitutions in WIC-approved foods when there are shortages. States can request substitutions in the following categories:

- types (e.g., allow full-fat or non-fat milk if non-fat milk is not available; and allow canned fruit and vegetables in states that currently only fresh and frozen produce)
- brands (e.g., allow available brands that meet the WIC nutrition standards)
- sizes (e.g., allow any sized loaf of whole-grain bread available instead of WIC's federal requirement for a one-pound loaf of bread) of WIC foods.

Missouri has not yet applied for a waiver to allow for these substitutions.

## **What waivers related to WIC has the department received from the federal government?**

- Physical Presence Waiver

Typically, participants must visit a WIC clinic in order to enroll or recertify for WIC. However, during the COVID-19 emergency, individuals may now apply or recertify for WIC remotely. The waiver also allows the postponement of lab tests that are usually required during a nutrition assessment at enrollment.

Several additional possibilities exist within WIC to help participants and staff stay safe and healthy [during pandemics](#). States may also apply for waivers to remove documentation requirement to verify income and residency and extend certification periods [among other measures](#).

## **Does the Families First Act that was recently passed by Congress include any flexibilities for WIC?**

The [Families First Coronavirus Response Act \(H.R. 6201\)](#) that was recently enacted by the federal government provides flexibility to allow individuals to enroll and recertify their eligibility without going to a local WIC agency. The legislation also allows WIC to defer the height, weight, and blood work requirements necessary to determine nutritional risk for applicants. Additionally, state WIC agencies can extend certification periods for current participants during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Outstanding Questions/Concerns**

1. What measures are being taken by DHSS and local WIC agencies in response to COVID-19?
2. Which of the flexibilities allowed under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act is DHSS planning to implement and what is the estimated timeline?
3. How is DHSS communicating its COVID-19 measures to local agencies, WIC participants and the public?

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