

# Frequently Asked Questions about WIC

## **Are WIC services free?**

Yes! All WIC services are free to women, infants and children who have a nutrition risk, meet the income guidelines and are Pennsylvania residents.

## **What does WIC consider as income?**

Income is counted for everyone living in the household and includes employment wages earned before taxes, self-employment earnings, dividend or interest income, Social Security benefits, SSI, public assistance, alimony or child support payments, unemployment compensation, worker's compensation, net rental income, and other cash income. Foster children under age 5 are eligible for WIC, and foster parent income is not considered.

## **If I receive MA (medical assistance), SNAP (food stamps) or TANF (temporary aid to needy families), may I also apply for WIC?**

Yes. In most instances, WIC has higher income guidelines than MA, SNAP or TANF. Even if you don't qualify for these programs, you may qualify for WIC.

## **What is the average value of a monthly WIC food package?**

Woman - \$65.00    Infant - \$105.00    Child - \$50.00

(This only includes the value of the food WIC provides, not the nutrition services provided at the WIC offices by trained nutrition professionals.)

## **Do I need to report WIC benefits on my income taxes?**

No

## **Why is it important for children to receive WIC benefits up to age 5?**

By staying on WIC, your child will receive foods to grow, and you will receive nutrition information and tips from a nutritionist on how to help your child develop good eating habits to stay healthy. These are the critical years for early childhood development.

## **What if I am a grandparent, father or foster parent?**

If you are a grandparent, father or foster parent who has custody of a child under age 5, you may apply for the child to receive WIC. Custody paperwork will be required for change of custody or other custody issues. Situations will be handled on a case-by-case basis.

## **What if I'm a teen? Do I qualify if I live with my mom or dad?**

In most cases, if you are a teen, and your parent(s) claim you as a dependent on their taxes, you must count all of the income of your household to determine if you are eligible for WIC. Please call your local WIC office to find out if you are income eligible.

## **What is hemoglobin and why does WIC test for it?**

Hemoglobin is a protein that uses iron to carry oxygen throughout our body. When children do not get enough iron in their diet, the body cannot make hemoglobin, which means that less

oxygen reaches cells and tissues and affects how the body works. In young children, iron is particularly important because it plays a role in muscle function, energy creation and brain development. Children who develop iron-deficiency anemia can develop learning and behavioral problems. As a public health program, WIC is required to check hemoglobin levels to help prevent iron-deficiency anemia.

### **Why does WIC limit formulas to iron-fortified?**

One of WIC's goals is to reduce rates of anemia. If a mother chooses not to breastfeed, iron-fortified formulas help prevent anemia. WIC does not provide low iron formulas because they do not provide enough iron for normal growth and development. Lack of iron can impact cognitive development and affect learning later in life. The American Academy of Pediatrics and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend iron-fortified formula for all formula fed infants for the entire first year of life.

### **What is the WIC infant formula rebate system?**

WIC encourages mothers to breastfeed their infants if possible; however, WIC will provide infant formula to mothers who are unable to breastfeed. USDA regulations mandate that all states establish a contract with one formula manufacturer as a cost savings measure. These contracts provide a rebate for every can of standard formula purchased by a WIC participant. In turn, the rebates received are immediately turned back to the program in order to serve more participants.

### **How does someone report a complaint or suspected program abuse?**

Selling or trading WIC foods is illegal! If someone sells or trades any WIC foods, it could result in criminal charges and/or disqualification from receiving future WIC benefits.

To report program abuse or a complaint, call 1-800-942-9467 and you will be connected with the local WIC agency serving that county. WIC staff investigate all complaints or reports of alleged program abuse and takes appropriate action if warranted. If you have already contacted the local WIC agency with no satisfaction, please call the state agency at 717-783-1289. WIC will keep the name of the reporter confidential if requested.