

WIC Local Agency Conference Call

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 22, 2023, 8:30-9:30 AM

Agenda and Summary Notes

Agenda Items:

- National Updates - Kate
- Food Package Updates – Rebecca & Jessie
- Infant Formula Updates – Jessie
- Federal Review – Kate
- Winnie Update – Tami
- Participation Update - Tami

National Updates- Kate

WIC ARPA Grant Waivers – Update on Process and Timeline

At the last LA call in February, we shared about the ARPA remote services waivers that USDA has made available for WIC State Agencies through September 31, 2026. These waivers include the physical presence requirement for WIC certification and recertifications if the anthropometrics and hematological measurements can be obtained by referral within the 60 days' timeframe. We plan to opt into this waiver and are in the process of putting together guidance for local agencies. We are planning to have this guidance ready to share with Advisory Group in April and share more broadly with agencies in May. We know you are all eager to have questions answered about how this will impact your agencies schedules and staffing, etc. We are waiting to get clarification from USDA on several questions that we've sent forward. We have a call scheduled with our regional office on 3/23 to discuss some of these questions. Until we get more clarification on some areas, we are not confident about sharing guidance with you all.

With the end of the current WIC waivers on August 9 and the start of the new ARPA waivers on August 10, it will mean some clear changes. The food package flexibilities that were added so that families could select 2% milk, even if they were issued skim/1% milk will be ending. This was always a temporary waiver that was issued at the time to address challenges with milk availability early in the pandemic. Another change we know for certain is that local agencies will need to begin offering the choice of in-person services to applicants and participants by August 10th. The ARPA waivers require that agencies offer in-person services as an option, but also outline some flexibilities for remote services in some cases. If you haven't already started offering in-person services in your agency, you will need to plan for this change to be made by August 10, 2023.

Keep in mind that even before we experienced the pandemic, secondary or additional nutrition education contacts can be offered remotely to participants via different means, and this will continue to be an option. Participants are not required to come in-person for secondary or additional nutrition education appointments/contacts and that flexibility will continue. This can be accomplished through the options outlined in [WIC Education Choice](#) on our WIC website.

[USDA Online Shopping Proposed Rule: WIC Online Ordering and Transactions Proposed Rule Q&As](#)

[Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children \(WIC\): Online Ordering and Transactions and Food Delivery Revisions To Meet the Needs of a Modern, Data-Driven Program](#)

USDA published the proposed rule, *WIC Online Ordering and Transactions and Food Delivery Revisions to Meet the Needs of a Modern, Data-Driven Program*, on February 23, 2023. They are requesting public comments on the proposed rule, which will be open through May 24, 2023. The Minnesota WIC Program will be providing comment on the proposed rules along with working with our MSWOOP project states to compile comments. We encourage you to review the proposed changes and provide comment as well.

[2023 State of WIC Report: Building the Bridge to a Healthier Future](#)

NWA published the 2023 State of WIC Report titled, *Building the Bridge to a Healthier Future* in February. The 2023 State of WIC report centers infant feeding, economic equity, and modernization of the WIC program. It brings lessons learned in 2022 to the forefront of the conversation on reforms, innovation, and policy. This report assesses the infant formula crisis, USDA's proposed food package rule, and WIC's role in building a healthier future for all.

Other Program Updates

- **Food Package Updates – Rebecca & Jessie**
 - Refer to Weekly Update on March 22, 2023, [Food Package Update](#) for details.
- **Infant Formula Updates – Jessie**
 - At the end of February 2023, MN WIC was granted waiver authority to continue allowing substitutes for all contract Enfamil products March – April 29, 2023.

Supply levels are being monitored and we are working with Mead Johnson to target areas with low supply. Corporate chains are beginning to get larger shipments of Gentlease. The issue is improving, and we hope to continue seeing greater supply through April. It will take time to put the product back on the shelves as Mead Johnson continues to release larger allocations of products in our area and as most states are back to only distributing the WIC contract products. If you hear that your area is still struggling to find formula, please place an order for product for direct ship and send Jessie Zins an email so we can work with the distributors and Mead Johnson in your area.
 - Some may be aware of a viral Facebook post about concerns with Gentlease being discolored. So far, MN WIC has not had reports of this concern. To learn more about these issues, we inquired with Mead Johnson on the topic. Their Medical Affairs team investigates all integrity concerns, and they informed MN that tiny black, brown, tan, orange or yellow particles can occasionally appear in powder products both dry or more prominent when mixed with water. The reason for the discoloration is most likely ingredients exposed to heat during the drying process. If ingredients stick inside the dryer, it can discolor ingredients. These colored particles will most often smear or break apart when pressed or rubbed between fingers. The formula company states scorched particles usually cannot be seen and quality control measures prevent batches from

going out if there is a high level of these particles. The takeaway from information provided by Mead Johnson is that the presence of darkened particles is not unusual and does not affect the quality of the formula.

If consumers have concerns, they should contact the number on the back of the label.

Please only share this information as needed, as it can cause panic in an already unstable market. Only share this information with families calling with questions and concerns with discoloration or safety. Currently there is no reason for concern, and we want to avoid causing panic and a mass return of Gentlease without valid reason.

If you do need to replace cans of formula for any reason, follow our current return and replacement policy or contact your State WIC consultant.

- **Federal Review – Kate**
 - Every three years FNS conducts the state Management Evaluation. Due to the COVID response, our last Federal Management Evaluation (ME) was in 2018. Federal reviewers announced that they will be conducting the ME mid-June with two Local Agencies, Goodhue, and Ramsey Counties. They will meet further with state staff at the end of July for additional review.
- **Winnie Update – Tami**
 - Will be beginning UAT round 2 on 4/3/23. We will be putting out a pilot and rollout out plan in May. We tentatively have pilot set to begin in October 2023.
- **Participation Update – Tami**
 - The participation continues to increase. We saw an increase from January to February which we hadn't seen in previous years.

Questions & Answers

Will you be able to pass on the answers to questions about the waivers as soon as you get them? There are concerns with not getting the information until May. Due to 3-month issuance, Local Agencies need to notify clients in May about what to expect in August. Also, the Local Agency needs some time to plan once the guidance is received.

We do understand that LAs are eager to get the guidance and we will make it available as soon as we can finalize it.

Will the milk change be communicated to families via the app?

Yes, there will be an app notification that will go to families mid-May about canned fruits and vegetables and the milk change. Watch the WU for information about these App notifications.

Will you be sending out some info we can share with staff about the viral Facebook post regarding discolored Gentlease formula?

See the notes from this meeting for additional information.

Is there any extra funding available for purchasing manual breast pumps beyond the WIC grant?

Manual breast pumps are WIC allowed expenses. Local Agencies can use their regular WIC grant and Supplemental funding to purchase breast pumps. Please see [Exhibit 2-D WIC Costs: Allowable and Unallowable](#) for more information about Supplemental Funding.

With canned fruits and vegetables, will participants with April and May benefits get the *usual* Fruit and Vegetable Cash Value Benefits (CVB)?

Yes. Participants will not get canned fruits and vegetables in their April and May benefits. Beginning June 1, canned products will be added to the [MN WIC Approved Product Listing \(APL\)](#) and will be WIC-allowed for participants with CVB.

Reference – Complete Listing of Hyperlinks

[WIC Education Choice](https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/edchoice/index.html) (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/edchoice/index.html>)

[USDA Online Shopping Proposed Rule: WIC Online Ordering and Transactions Proposed Rule Q&As](https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/online-ordering-transaction-proposed-rule-qas) (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/online-ordering-transaction-proposed-rule-qas>)

[Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children \(WIC\): Online Ordering and Transactions and Food Delivery Revisions To Meet the Needs of a Modern, Data-Driven Program](https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/02/23/2023-02484/special-supplemental-nutrition-program-for-women-infants-and-children-wic-online-ordering-and-transactions-and-food-delivery-revisions-to-meet-the-needs-of-a-modern-data-driven-program) (<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/02/23/2023-02484/special-supplemental-nutrition-program-for-women-infants-and-children-wic-online-ordering-and-transactions-and-food-delivery-revisions-to-meet-the-needs-of-a-modern-data-driven-program> and?utm_source=federalregister.gov&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=subscription%20mailing%20list)

[Food Package Update](https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/wu/2023/0322fp.pdf) (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/wu/2023/0322fp.pdf>)

[2023 State of WIC Report: Building the Bridge to a Healthier Future](https://thewichub.org/2023-state-of-wic-report/) (<https://thewichub.org/2023-state-of-wic-report/>)

[Exhibit 2-D WIC Costs: Allowable and Unallowable](https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/program/mom/exhbts/ex2/2d.pdf) (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/program/mom/exhbts/ex2/2d.pdf>)

[MN WIC Approved Product Listing \(APL\)](https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.health.state.mn.us%2Fdocs%2Fpeople%2Fwic%2Fvendor%2Ffpchg%2Fupc%2Fapl.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK) (<https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.health.state.mn.us%2Fdocs%2Fpeople%2Fwic%2Fvendor%2Ffpchg%2Fupc%2Fapl.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>)

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