



NORTH CAROLINA

**Remote Services:
Local Agency Considerations**

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Prerequisites for Remote WIC Services: Local Agency Considerations

Food access is a priority as part of the collective response to the COVID-19 pandemic and each local WIC agency plays a central role in addressing food insecurity in their service area. As such, **WIC agencies must remain accessible and operational to assure benefits are available to current AND new participants.**

The Nutrition Services Branch (NSB) has received approval from USDA to waive the physical presence requirements for participants and applicants. Please follow the NSB guidance [Certification without Physical Presence](#) in order to minimize face-to-face interactions. We encourage virtual or telephonic contacts with participants utilizing flexibilities around remote issuance of benefits.

If your local agency's WIC Program operations change, you are required to contact your RNC, NSB Customer Service Desk, and update your "WIC and COVID-19 Operating Changes Survey" using your personalized link received from Survey Monkey to reflect your local agency's current operational status. If you need assistance with the survey link, contact your RNC.

Administrative / Operations Considerations

At this critical time, consider how you will communicate with participants, the public, and partnering organizations if your WIC clinic operations change.

- Ensure your RNC is notified of any changes to the WIC Director's contact information.
- Identify staff to act as back-up if the WIC Director is quarantined or otherwise unavailable; provide alternative contact information to the RNC.
- Ensure phone trees / outgoing messages are as clear and concise as possible
 - Describe current services ("To support our families during the COVID-19 outbreak, WIC services are being offered over the phone. If you have a scheduled appointment, a WIC staff will contact you to conduct your appointment over the phone, make your WIC benefits available and schedule your next WIC appointment.")
 - State how to reach the Breastfeeding Peer Counselor and/or Warm Line.
 - Encourage callers to leave a message stating whether they are an applicant or a participant, and if they are a participant what specific service or question with which they need help. Return messages promptly. If you are not able to change phone trees, contact your RNC with the BEST phone number for participants to call WIC. Your text appointment reminder template can be changed to include this information. Changing the template can take up to three days.

- Use your web presence to provide accurate information. Web presence may include your Health Department website, Facebook, or any other agency-allowed social media.
 - Describe current services
 - Example: *“To support our families during the COVID-19 outbreak, WIC services are being offered over the phone. If you have a scheduled appointment, a WIC staff will contact you to conduct your appointment over the phone, make your WIC benefits available, and schedule your next WIC appointment.”*
 - Add the URL to the WIC online referral link to local agency’s website
 - URL: <https://www.nutritionnc.com/wic/wic-referral.asp>
 - Add the following phone numbers to your local agency’s website:
 - Each of your local agency’s WIC clinic,
 - Breastfeeding Warm Line
 - Breastfeeding Peer Counselor

- Inform the necessary internal and external community partners of operational changes and provide them with your local agency’s contact information, such as:
 - Childcare providers
 - Medical providers (birthing hospitals, pediatric providers)
 - Social Services
 - Food banks
 - Other public health services

- Develop a plan for accepting deliveries of formula/breastfeeding supplies shipped from the NSB warehouse or office

- Create procedures for provision of tangible items for WIC participants as outlined in the NSB guidance [Certification without Physical Presence](#). Local agencies may consider:
 - Curbside pick-up
 - Mailing
 - Coordination with community partners

- Review the local agency disaster plan, WIC business continuity plan, and WIC Program Manual [Chapter 17](#) for Crossroads connectivity information in case staff will need to work remotely.
 - Teleworking Policy (local decision)
 - Security and confidentiality (local responsibility)
 - Review the WIC Program Manual [Chapter 17](#) for the equipment necessary for remote Crossroads access, this may include:
 - Laptop (PC) with Window 10/Crossroads
 - Internet or MiFi
 - Virtual Private Network (VPN)

○ Signature pad

Explore partnerships with neighboring WIC Programs that may be able to assist if your services are severely limited.

Disseminate operational changes and plan for the continued provision of WIC services to local agency staff.

Remote Food Benefit Issuance: Local Agency Considerations

The guidance document titled, NSB guidance [Certification without Physical Presence](#) and shared on March 24, 2020 with local WIC Directors set the **expectation for the issuance of 3 months of food benefits to most participants** as able during the COVID-19 outbreak. Local agencies must develop procedures for the continuation of food benefit issuance to participants referring to North Carolina WIC Program Manual [Chapter 8, Section 3](#). When developing these procedures local agencies should evaluate the following considerations:

- Proper Crossroads documentation

- Staff who issue remotely must also sign for food benefits per the NSB guidance [Certification without Physical Presence](#). Consider the requirement for a signature pad if staff are working off-site.

- Review the family's shopping list with the Parent/Guardian, Caretaker, or Proxy. Local agencies should consider alternative communication methods for review, which includes:
 - Email
 - Bnft® App ([English](#)) ([Spanish](#))
 - Bnft® website
 - Bnft® Customer Service number at 1-844-230-0813
 - Coordination with community partners

- Staff should have a safe and approved plan to offer the services and navigate the interaction for:
 - The return of physical product from the participant to Local Agency as necessary for the use of the "Increase/Exchange" feature in Crossroads
 - The issuance of a product ordered from the NSB

- Contact the Nutrition Service Branch's Customer Service Desk if there are complications during Food Benefit Issuance

State-Assisted Food Benefit Issuance

NSB will begin state-assisted issuance starting the week of April 13, 2020 and continue until notified. State-assisted issuance reports will be sent out to local WIC Directors periodically by the NSB's Customer Service Desk.

State-Assisted food benefit issuance is being provided to assist local agencies and as a safety net for participants. However, state-assisted food benefit issuance does not preclude Local Agencies from the provision of WIC Program services as part of the daily clinic processes.

- Review state-assisted issuance reports
 - Refer to [State-Assisted Food Benefit Issuance During COVID-19](#) guidance

Remote Food Package Changes: Local Agency Considerations

The guidance document titled, [Certification without Physical Presence](#) and shared on March 24, 2020 with local WIC Directors set the expectation for WIC services including changes to a participant food package during the COVID-19 outbreak. Local agencies must develop procedures for the continuation of food package changes as necessary to serve participants. When developing these procedures local agencies should evaluate the following considerations:

If a participant requests a food package change:

- Assess the local agency staff capabilities, considerations may include:
 - Modify food prescriptions (Competent Professional Authority's only)
 - Assess if any necessary changes to Crossroad's user roles ([Crossroad's User Access Request](#) form)

- A Competent Professional Authority (CPA) must:
 - Discuss food package change with family
 - Document appropriately in Crossroads
 - Create new Food Prescription for participant in Crossroads

- Changes requiring medical documentation from a health care provider:
 - Develop a plan for the receipt and sharing of medical documentation
 - Determine method for recording medical documentation in Crossroads

- Contact the Nutrition Services Branch's Customer Service Desk if necessary

Remote Pump Issuance: Local Agency Considerations

The guidance document titled, [Certification without Physical Presence](#) shared on March 24, 2020 with local WIC Directors set the expectation that the provision of breastfeeding promotion and support continues through the COVID-19 outbreak. Local agencies must develop procedures for the continuation of pump issuance. When developing these procedures local agencies should evaluate the following considerations:

- Assess available inventory of single-user manual and electric pumps and multi-user electric pumps.
- When a participant meets the criteria for the issuance of a multi-user electric pump as outlined in the [WIC Program Manual Chapter 9: Section 5](#), the local agency has the option to provide a single-user electric pump in lieu of the multi-user electric pumps. Refer to the [Certification without Physical Presence](#) guidance document for instructions for ordering more single-user electric pumps.
 - Utilize your local agency inventory before ordering additional single-user electric pumps
 - When your inventory of single-user electric pumps has depleted, orders should be based on a two-week projection of need.
- Familiarize your local agency staff with the
 - [Teaching Checklist For Remote Pump Issuance](#)
 - [Breast Pump Issuance Resources for COVID-19](#)
- Develop your local agency plan for delivery of the pump to the participants. The [Certification without Physical Presence](#) lists options for consideration when your local agency is not continuing to provide face-to-face WIC Program services.

Remote Nutrition Education: Local Agency Considerations

The guidance document titled, [Certification without Physical Presence](#) and shared on March 24, 2020 with local WIC Directors set the expectation that the provision of nutrition education through the COVID-19 outbreak. Local WIC Agency staff are expected to continue to provide high risk and low risk nutrition education.

- Assure compliance with the North Carolina WIC Program Manual [Chapter 5: Nutrition Education](#) policy. Refer to the [Certification without Physical Presence](#) document for guidance on approved waiver exceptions.

- Determine the technology platform(s) your local agency will utilize for the provision of remote nutrition education. Local agencies should consider their organizational requirements when selecting each technology platform and broadband capabilities of WIC participants. Local agencies may consider:
 - Telephone
 - TeleHealth/Videoconferencing
 - Text Messaging Services (Low risk only)
 - <https://www.wichealth.org/> (Low risk only)

- Evaluate available online nutrition education resources. Consider how the local agency staff will provide online nutrition education resources to WIC participants. Available nutrition education resources may include:
 - All WIC participants:
 - <https://www.nutritionnc.com/edres/index.htm>
 - <https://www.ncfamilieseatingbetter.org/EFNEP/participants.php>
 - <https://www.eatsmartmovemorenc.com/myesmm/myesmm-core-behaviors/>
 - Pregnant Women:
 - <https://www.readysetbabyonline.com/>

- Develop a local agency plan for the provision of printed materials, if necessary. A local agency may consider:
 - Mailing
 - Curbside services
 - Coordination with community partners

If additional printed materials are required, please complete the [NSB Materials Requisition Form](#).

What to Provide: Local Agency Considerations

After a WIC service has been provided, there may be required mailing or sharing of documents and resources with the WIC participant. For these services, mail or provide the following resources:

Certifications

All participants:

- NC WIC Program Notice ([English](#)) ([Spanish](#))
- Printed Shopping List
- Rights & Responsibilities ([English](#)) ([Spanish](#))
- “And Justice for All” ([English/Spanish](#)) ([Other Languages](#))
- Voter Registration Application
- Nutrition Education and WICHealth.org materials
 - See *Remote Nutrition Education: Local Agency Considerations*
- List of Referral organizations (if indicated)

Additional for Initial Certifications:

- Assigned eWIC card
- The eWIC card brochure ([English](#)) ([Spanish](#))
 - Bnft® App ([English](#)) ([Spanish](#))
- WIC Approved Store List ([English](#))
- Shopping Guide ([English](#)) ([Spanish](#))

Nutrition Education or Breastfeeding Support Services

- Nutrition Education and WICHealth.org materials
 - See *Remote Nutrition Education: Local Agency Considerations*
- Printed Shopping List
- NC WIC Program Notice ([English](#)) ([Spanish](#))