

641—73.7(135) Food delivery. Food delivery refers to all aspects of the method by which WIC participants receive food benefits, including but not limited to the issuing, distribution, and processing of personal food instruments redeemable through retail food markets and the statewide banking system. Food delivery shall be uniform throughout the state as provided for by these rules.

73.7(1) Responsibilities of WIC participants.

a. Prompt redemption of food instruments. A WIC participant must redeem WIC benefits within the validated date of use.

b. Claiming food instruments and benefits. Enrolled participants are required to appear in person to claim food instruments and benefits when they have appointments to certify or have face-to-face, scheduled nutrition education contacts. Enrolled participants who complete their nutrition education contacts via a state-approved Internet nutrition education platform are not required to appear in person to claim food instruments and benefits. A proxy may pick up food instruments as described in the Iowa WIC Policy and Procedure Manual.

c. Adherence to standards for use of the food instrument. The WIC participant in using the WIC food instrument to obtain the specified foods shall:

(1) At the time of receipt of food benefits in the clinic, electronically sign that food benefits were received.

(2) Swipe the eWIC card at the vendor's ECR and enter the participant's PIN at point of purchase.

(3) Not accept money in exchange for unused food benefits or portions of the food allotment.

(4) Attempt to redeem food benefits only with a WIC-contracted vendor.

73.7(2) Responsibilities of contract agencies.

a. Loss or theft of food instruments. The contract agency is responsible for any financial loss due to theft or other loss of food instruments from clinics. Steps for minimizing the chances of theft or loss are followed in accord with the Iowa WIC Policy and Procedure Manual.

b. Mailing of WIC food instruments. Mailing of food instruments to participants is allowed only in specific situations as described in the Iowa WIC Policy and Procedure Manual. Any mailing of WIC food instruments must have prior approval from the state.

c. Training/monitoring of WIC vendors. The contract agency shall communicate information regarding the Iowa WIC program to vendors, as instructed by the department. Monitoring and training of vendors and securement of contracts shall be carried out in accordance with department directives outlined in the Iowa WIC Policy and Procedure Manual.

d. Food instrument/benefits distribution on non-clinic days. It is the policy of the Iowa WIC program to ensure maximum accessibility to program benefits by establishing alternate procedures for distributing WIC food instruments to participants on days other than regularly scheduled clinic days when the participant notified the contract agency on or before the clinic day of the participant's inability to appear at the clinic. Each contract agency shall establish written guidelines for assessing the adequacy of reasons presented for inability to appear and shall establish written procedures for alternative means of food instrument/benefits distribution when a participant timely presents adequate reasons for inability to appear on a regularly scheduled clinic day. These written guidelines and procedures shall be subject to review and approval by the department.

73.7(3) Responsibilities of department. Provision of foods through retail grocers and special purpose vendors is an integral part of the WIC program's function. It is the responsibility of the department to ensure that there are a sufficient number of vendors authorized to provide reasonable access for WIC participants. The department also has an obligation to ensure that both food and administrative funds are expended in the most efficient manner possible. As with all other purchases made by state government, this means that all vendors must meet minimum criteria for approval. The Iowa WIC program does not limit the number of vendors that may participate in the agency service area. A retailer that intends to derive more than 50 percent of annual revenue of the sale of food items from the redemption of WIC food instruments will not be allowed. The department shall be responsible for the following:

a. Approving or denying vendor applications. The department shall determine if applications meet the mandatory specifications in 73.7(4) and meet the minimum review points in 73.7(4) for a subsequent agreement.

b. Compiling the statewide or local area composite data against which vendor applications are reviewed, determining if applications meet the selection criteria which require use of that data, providing training, and signing the initial authorization agreement if a vendor is determined eligible.

c. Developing procedures, forms, and standards for agencies to use in conducting on-site review of vendor applications, monitoring, compliance buys, educational buy monitoring, or compliance investigations as defined in 73.7(5).

d. Determining when compliance investigation activities are necessary to verify WIC program violations, developing or approving standards and procedures to be used in conducting the activities, and arranging for an appropriate state or private agency to conduct the compliance buying investigation as required.

e. Providing to vendors written notice of WIC program violations and sanctions.

f. Ensuring that activities related to eWIC follow information provided by FNS's WIC EBT operating rules, WIC EBT Technical Implementation Guide and FNS Handbook 901.

73.7(4) Responsibilities of WIC vendors. A potential vendor shall make application to the Iowa department of public health WIC program and shall accept the obligations imposed by the signing of a WIC vendor agreement prior to acceptance of any WIC food instrument. The two categories for which any potential vendor may apply are grocery vendors and special purpose vendors. A retailer that intends to derive more than 50 percent of annual revenue of the sale of food items, for grocery vendors, or of infant and special medical formula, for special purpose vendors, from the redemption of WIC food instruments will not be approved.

a. WIC vendor agreement. To qualify for a WIC vendor agreement with the Iowa WIC program, a retail outlet shall meet all of the following criteria:

(1) The vendor must stock all of the following categories of items to be defined as a grocery vendor: a minimum of 5 linear feet of raw fruits and vegetables; a minimum of 12 linear feet of unbreaded fresh or frozen meats and poultry (prepackaged luncheon meats do not qualify); canned and frozen vegetables; dairy products; cereals; and breads.

(2) No more than 20 percent of the vendor's gross retail sales may be from the sale of gasoline or other automotive supplies.

(3) No more than 20 percent of the vendor's gross retail sales may be from the sale of alcoholic beverages and tobacco products.

(4) The vendor must maintain regular business hours. This shall include a minimum of two 4-hour blocks of time on each of five days per week. Daily operating hours shall be consistent from week to week and shall be posted.

(5) The vendor must stock the minimum variety and quantity of WIC-approved foods as defined in the latest revised version of the Iowa WIC vendor application.

1. The specific brands of products that are included on the WIC-approved food list shall be made available to the vendor at the time of application and prior to renewal of each agreement.

2. The variety and quantity in stock are defined as including both inventory on display and in on-premises storage, but not inventory on order from suppliers.

(6) The vendor must purchase formula only from state-licensed wholesalers, distributors, retailers, and infant formula manufacturers registered with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) through a list maintained by the WIC program.

(7) A vendor shall charge a price to WIC participants that is equal to or less than the price charged to all other customers. The vendor's average price for any category of WIC items, as reported on the application, at the time of the on-site review, and throughout the agreement period, shall not exceed 115 percent of the average price charged for the same category by all other WIC vendors in the same peer group. Categories refer to the broad groupings of items rather than specific brands. For purposes of making the price comparisons, the average price for all other WIC vendors in the peer group shall be computed from the most recent Price Assessment Reports on file from those vendors. If a vendor intends to comply with this provision by charging WIC participants a lower price than the price charged to other customers, the WIC price for each approved item must be identified on the package or shelf front.

(8) Vendors will also be selected based on access to WIC participants. If at all possible, at least one vendor contract will be maintained in rural counties where a WIC clinic is located. The Iowa WIC program does not limit the number of vendors that may participate in the agency service area.

(9) The vendor must have a current state of Iowa food establishment license.

(10) The vendor must consistently identify WIC products by using shelf labels that meet specific criteria and price points as described in the WIC Vendor Instructions and Agreement Booklet as found in the Iowa WIC Policy and Procedure Manual.

(11) The vendor must not have had a Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) disqualification or civil monetary penalty imposed within the 12 months preceding the date of the application or reauthorization.

(12) The vendor must not have had a WIC program suspension imposed or a WIC application denied within the six-month period preceding the date of the application.

(13) The vendor must not have had a conviction or civil judgment for any activity that indicates a lack of business integrity against any of the officers or owners during the previous six years.

(14) The vendor must accept training on WIC program regulations prior to signing an agreement and must agree to provide training to all employees who will handle WIC food instruments prior to accepting any food instruments.

(15) The vendor must agree to adhere to all provisions of the WIC Vendor Instructions and Agreement Booklet as found in the Iowa WIC Policy and Procedure Manual.

b. Special purpose vendor. To qualify as a special purpose vendor, a retail outlet shall meet all of the following criteria:

(1) The vendor may be primarily a retailer of any type of merchandise but shall be authorized to provide only specified infant formula in exchange for WIC food instruments.

(2) The vendor must be able to provide the specified formula within 48 hours; 72 hours if a weekend or holiday is involved.

(3) The prices charged to WIC participants must be equal to or less than the prices charged to all other customers. The average price of each brand of infant formula sold to WIC participants as reported must not exceed the average price of the same brands of infant formula charged by all authorized WIC grocery vendors in the same peer group.

(4) The vendor shall meet the criteria in paragraph 73.7(4)“a,” subparagraphs (2) through (4), (6) through (8), and (10) through (15), for grocery vendors.

(5) The vendor must agree to adhere to applicable provisions of the WIC Vendor Instructions and Agreement Booklet as found in the Iowa WIC Policy and Procedure Manual.

c. Application review. The department shall review each vendor application within five working days of receipt and determine if the information provided indicates that the retail outlet meets the selection criteria. If the application shows that the vendor does not meet one or more of the criteria, the department shall deny the application. If the vendor’s application indicates that the vendor would qualify, the department or contract agency shall make an on-site visit to verify that the information provided in the application is correct, to provide training, and sign the agreement. If the department or contract agency finds that the vendor has two or more types of out-of-date, stale, or moldy WIC foods in stock during the on-site visit, the vendor’s application may be denied. If the contract agency or department determines during the on-site visit that the vendor does not qualify, the contract agency or department shall not sign the agreement. Within five working days of disapproving an application or agreement, the department will advise the vendor in writing of the reasons for denial of the application and the procedure for appeal. During the on-site visit, the contract agency representative is acting as an agent of the department and has the authority to approve or deny an application.

A vendor that is denied an agreement, either at the application review level or at the on-site review, is required to wait six months prior to submitting a new application. Prior to completing its review, the department may, at its discretion, request a vendor to resubmit an application if the application has not been completed to the extent that a determination of eligibility can be made.

d. Reauthorization. If ownership of an authorized vendor changes during the agreement period, the agreement becomes void. The new owner must file an application and be approved prior to accepting WIC

food instruments. The WIC vendor agreement is valid only for the period of time specified, and a vendor may not continue accepting food instruments past the expiration date unless a new agreement is signed. When a currently authorized vendor makes application for a subsequent agreement, an agreement shall be signed only if the vendor has been assessed less than 60 violation points under paragraph 73.19(2) "b" during a contract period.

Vendors must complete a new application and sign a new WIC vendor agreement at least every three years to continue accepting WIC food instruments.

The department shall send the vendor written notice at least 30 days prior to the expiration of the agreement that it does not intend to offer the vendor a new agreement if the vendor has been assessed 60 or more violation points under paragraph 73.19(2) "b" during a contract period or if any of the following conditions are in effect:

(1) The vendor has failed to submit any of the preceding year's Price Assessment Reports by the specified dates.

(2) Any of the selection criteria listed in 73.7(4) "a" and "b" above are no longer met.

Expiration of a WIC vendor agreement is not subject to appeal. A vendor who is not offered a new agreement by the department has the right to file a new application. If that application is denied, the vendor has the right to appeal.

e. Training. Vendors shall accept training in WIC program policies and procedures at the on-site review prior to becoming an authorized vendor and shall be responsible for training all employees who will be handling WIC food instruments. The manager and person responsible for staff training must allow time at this visit for training; the agreement will not be signed until training is completed. Vendors shall be responsible for all actions of their employees in conducting WIC transactions.

If violations of WIC program policies and procedures are documented, either through on-site monitoring or other indirect means, the vendor shall implement a corrective action training plan developed jointly by the vendor and the department or contract agency.

f. Cooperation during monitorings. Contracted WIC vendors shall cooperate with department and contract agency staff who are present on site to monitor the vendor's WIC activities.

g. Reimbursement to the WIC program. Vendors determined by the department to have collected more moneys than the true value of food items received shall make reimbursement to the department.

73.7(5) Vendor monitoring. To maintain WIC program integrity and accountability for federal or state program funds, the department and contract agencies shall conduct ongoing monitoring of authorized vendors, both through on-site visits and through indirect means. A sample of 10 percent of currently authorized vendors receives on-site monitoring every year. Vendors that change ownership during the year or that apply during the contract period receive an on-site visit prior to signing an agreement. The types of on-site monitoring are defined as follows:

a. Routine or representative monitoring is used for vendors for which there is no record of violations or complaints or other indication of problems. It may include any or all of the following: use of a food instrument or observation of a participant, educational buys, review of inventory levels, review of vendor policies on return items, and review of employee training procedures. The results of the monitoring are reviewed with the owner or manager on duty, and a follow-up letter confirming the findings is sent from the department. Routine monitoring may be performed by the department or by contract agency staff under the direction of the department. Depending on the nature and severity of violations noted, the department may schedule additional visits, initiate a compliance investigation, or apply sanctions.

Educational buy monitoring is a specialized type of routine monitoring. Department or contract agency staff attempt to use a WIC food instrument to purchase unauthorized types or brands of foods to test the level of training of vendor employees. At the conclusion of the transaction, the results of the buy are discussed with the vendor owner or manager on duty. After an educational buy is conducted, the purchased food may be donated. Educational buys are used on authorized vendors selected by the department. If unauthorized items are allowed to be purchased, the vendor shall agree to a corrective action training plan. A follow-up educational buy is scheduled within 30 to 90 days. A letter is sent from the department documenting the violation. By signing a WIC vendor agreement, a vendor gives consent for educational buys by the department or contract agency. Vendors are not notified in advance that an educational buy is

scheduled. The protocol for educational buys, including procedures, appropriate items to purchase, and forms to be used, is specified in the Iowa WIC Policy and Procedure Manual.

b. Electronic monitoring is examination of indicators tracked in the vendor computer database. It allows the analysis of data collected via computer from the contract agencies and the state's bank, from which patterns indicating compliance with or deviation from established patterns for Iowa WIC vendors emerge. Data is collected daily and reviewed on an ongoing basis. Trends identified can necessitate another type of monitoring, depending on the nature of each exception.

c. Compliance investigations may be used for any vendors. Compliance investigations will be conducted annually in a minimum percentage of vendors as mandated in federal regulations. A compliance investigation includes a sufficient number of compliance buys to provide evidence of WIC program noncompliance, two compliance buys in which no WIC program violations are found, or when an inventory audit has been completed. A compliance buy means a covert, on-site investigation in which a representative of the WIC program poses as a participant, parent or caretaker, or proxy, transacts one or more food instruments and does not reveal during the visit that he or she is a WIC representative. Compliance buys may be performed by the department or another state agency or private company under contract with the department. The department is responsible for identifying the vendors to be investigated and for approving the protocol to be used during the investigation. Upon completion of a compliance buy documenting WIC program violations, the department shall issue the vendor a notice of violation points assessed unless such notification would hinder an investigation.

The department also monitors vendor performance through in-office review of information. Such information, specifically the total amount of WIC redemptions, is confidential as provided for in Iowa Code section 22.7(6). This business information could provide an advantage to competitors and would serve no public purpose if made available.

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