

SECTION: Certification**SUBJECT: Certification Process and Applicant Processing Standards**

Federal Regulations: §246.7 and 246.7(f)(2)

POLICY

The process of certification is undertaken to determine an applicant's eligibility to receive the program benefits in accordance with the Federal Regulations of the WIC program and State guidelines. Processing standards are set to ensure timely enrollment in the WIC program and shouldn't be used as a de facto waiting period for WIC enrollment. Local agencies must make every effort to schedule applicants as soon as possible, as the schedule allows, with the understanding that same day or appointments prior to the 20 or 10 day standards are preferred.

Local agency staff shall develop a system to certify applicants for WIC benefits using the processing standards/ timeframes outlined in below:

Federal Regulations: §246.7 (f)(2)(i-iii)

Local agencies shall notify applicants of their eligibility status not later than **20 calendar days** from the date of application.

Exception:

Women applicants who would become Priority I participants and migrant farm workers and their family members, shall be notified these applicants of their eligibility not later than **10 calendar days** following the date of application.

State Exception:

Infants under one year of age and the homeless shall be scheduled within **10 calendar days** of the initial date of the request for program benefits (date of application) to determine WIC eligibility. Also, in cases where all the required documentation is available and WIC benefits are urgently needed to ensure an applicant's nutritional health, a shorter timeframe for a certification appointment is warranted.

Required Procedures

The *date of application* is when an applicant visits or calls the local program during office hours to make an oral or a written request for program benefits OR the local agency receives a completed certification form from a health care provider (HCP).

When an applicant applies for WIC benefits, screen for *eligibility* (category, residency, income), complete the CT-WIC Pre-Certification screen and verify the income in the CT-WIC Income Guidelines screen. Tell the applicant about the application process and schedule an appointment if appropriate.

Special Considerations for Pregnant Applicants §246.4(a)(19); 246.7(c)(2)(ii) and 246.7(e)(1)(v)

Local agencies must establish a system to support early (1st trimester) and continuous enrollment of pregnant women in the WIC Program. When staff is available, walk-in pregnant women should be enrolled **immediately**. In order to facilitate 1st trimester enrollment of prenatal women, local agencies should have working knowledge of health care facilities in the area that provide no cost pregnancy tests in order for applicants to document pregnancy for WIC certification.

Presumptive Pregnancy Guidelines

If a pregnant applicant reports that she has a medical appointment for her pregnancy, but doesn't have proof of pregnancy at her initial certification visit, initiate the certification process, obtain height and weight and conduct a nutrition assessment. If other eligibility criteria are met, issue one month of food benefits and document appropriately in CT-WIC. At the next appointment, WIC staff must follow-up on the documentation of proof of pregnancy. If no proof is available, after appropriate nutrition education is provided, issue another, one month of food benefits. After a period of 60-days, if no proof of pregnancy is provided, she may be terminated from the program until proof is provided.

If a pregnant applicant is not enrolled in prenatal care, refer her to an appropriate health service (as noted above) to facilitate documentation of her pregnancy. Initiate the certification process, obtain height, weight and conduct a nutrition assessment. If other eligibility criteria are met, issue one month of food benefits and document in CT-WIC. At the next appointment, WIC staff must follow-up on the documentation of proof of pregnancy and access to prenatal care. If no proof is available, after appropriate nutrition education is provided, issue another, one month of food benefits. After a period of 60-days, if no proof of pregnancy is provided, she may be terminated from the program until proof is provided.

If a pregnant applicant is visibly pregnant, obtain height and weight, initiate the certification process and if eligible, issue one month of benefits. At the next appointment, WIC staff must follow-up on the documentation of proof of pregnancy and access to prenatal care. If no proof is available, after appropriate nutrition education is provided, issue another, one month of food benefits. After a period of 60-days, if no proof of pregnancy is provided, she may be terminated from the program until proof is provided.

Contact a pregnant applicant who misses her initial certification or subsequent appointment to determine if she would like to reschedule. If an applicant cannot be reached by phone, contact should be made by e-mail or mail as appropriate.

Other considerations

Applicants or participants who are employed, live in rural areas, students or any other individual who requests a convenient appointment to apply for participation in the program should be accommodated.

Extension to notification period

Local agencies may request State approval to extend the 10-day notification time frame to 15 days for women applicants who would become Priority I participants and migrant farm workers and their families. Such requests must be submitted in writing to the State WIC agency and must be accompanied by a justification. Acceptable justifications for requesting an extension to the processing standards include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Limited number of times at a particular distribution site
2. Local agency staff shortages
3. Inclement weather

Agencies may submit requests to extend the notification time period at any time. In most cases, approval will be valid through the end of the federal fiscal year during which the request was made. Shorter approvals may be granted at the discretion of the State agency. The annual reapplication for funding is one method by which agencies may renew their requests.