



eWIC Frequently Asked Questions

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Section 1. Introduction and General Questions

Question Summary (See below for answer)

1. What is eWIC?
2. Are WIC benefits still food specific?
3. How many eWIC cards can a family have?
4. What does the eWIC card look like?
5. What kind of equipment is needed for stores?
6. What are the benefits of integrating our point-of-sale device?
7. What happens if the internet goes down?
8. Will there be a way for eWIC transactions to be run in case of a disaster?
9. How are reimbursements processed?
10. How are reimbursements calculated?
11. What if my store price is over the MAR?
12. How will the store know if prices are over the MAR?
13. Will there be rejection or adjustment fees if my store prices are over the MAR?
14. What is the APL?
15. Where can I find the APL?
16. How do APL updates reach the store's point-of-sale system?
17. Can new foods be added to the APL?

Answers:

1. What is eWIC?
 - a. eWIC is the term used for electronic benefits transfer (EBT) payments for WIC foods. In 2019, the State of Alaska stopped issuing WIC benefits on paper checks and now issue nutritious foods to WIC households' benefit accounts that may be purchased with their EBT cards.
2. Are WIC benefits still food specific?
 - a. Yes, eWIC cards have specific food types and amounts assigned to each household. This is different than SNAP (Quest) cards, which are loaded with a dollar value.

3. How many eWIC cards can a family have?
 - a. One per household.
4. What does the eWIC card look like?



5. What kind of equipment is needed for stores?
 - a. All authorized WIC stores are required to have a point of sale system that is capable of processing eWIC transactions. Stores are considered either “Integrated” or “Stand-Beside” capable. Integrated stores are those with electronic cash register (ECR) systems or similar with Universal Product Code (UPC) scanning capability. If the store is not integrated, it may use one or more stand-beside devices with a hand-held UPC scanner that operates independently of the vendor’s cash register system. Stand-beside devices are obtained from the State of Alaska WIC Program’s eWIC processor.
6. What are the benefits of integrating our point of sale device?
 - a. Integrated cash register systems streamline the transaction process by allowing a mixed basket of WIC and non-WIC items; cashiers do not have to scan each item separately into the cash register and the stand-beside device; your store will not need to worry about maintenance on a separate point of sale system; and the participant can use multiple payment methods in the same transaction (eWIC card, SNAP, credit or debit card, and/or cash).
7. What happens if your internet goes down?
 - a. Your store will not be able to process any eWIC transactions. This is the same for stand-beside and integrated stores.
8. Will there be a way for eWIC transactions to be run in the case of a disaster?
 - a. If communications are disrupted by a natural disaster, the eWIC card will not be able to be used until communications are restored. The WIC program is a supplemental program and is not considered a first responder in case of natural disasters.
9. How are reimbursements processed?
 - a. Reimbursements for WIC foods are processed by the State program’s eWIC benefits processor, Fidelity Information Systems (FIS). Deposits are made electronically into your store’s account within two business days.
10. How are reimbursements calculated?
 - a. The State of Alaska WIC program calculates the Maximum Allowable Reimbursement (MAR) (also known as Not to Exceed limit “NTE”) based on actual purchase prices by peer group on a rolling basis.
11. What if my store price is over the MAR?
 - a. Your store will receive reimbursement within two business days at the maximum allowable reimbursement amount.

12. How will the store know if prices are over the MAR?
 - a. The State of Alaska WIC program does not share their calculated MAR/NTE prices. Stand-beside devices will allow cashiers to print a “vendor copy” after each eWIC purchase. The “vendor copy” will list NTE adjustments which represent amounts requested by the store that will not be paid by the WIC program. Integrated stores will need to contact their point of sale system provider to inquire how to access this information in their specific POS system.
13. Will there be rejection or adjustment fees if my store prices are over the MAR?
 - a. No, there are no fees assessed by the WIC program or its contractors for rejected transactions or adjustments.
14. What is the APL?
 - a. “APL” stands for Approved Products List. The APL is maintained by the State of Alaska WIC program and lists each UPC and PLU approved for purchase with eWIC benefits. Items not listed on the APL are not WIC approved. However, integrated stores that produce unique UPCs for produce may map UPCs to the closest PLU. Please contact your point of sale provider for assistance in produce mapping.
15. Where can I find the APL?
 - a. The current APL can be found by visiting <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dpa/Pages/nutri/wic/approved-foods.aspx>.
16. How do APL updates reach the stores’ point of sale system?
 - a. An updated APL is made available daily. Your stand-beside device has been programmed to update nightly as long as it is connected to a working Ethernet connection. Integrated stores should also be programmed to update daily - for questions, please contact your cash register system provider.
17. Can new foods be added to the APL?
 - a. Yes, products can be submitted to the State of Alaska WIC program at any time via the WICShopper app, email to wic@alaska.gov or fax to (907) 465-3416. Information about each product should include, at a minimum, the following details: full UPC number (typically 12 digits), brand name, product name and description, package size and images of the product label including ingredient list and nutrition facts.

Section 2. WIC Benefit Details

Question Summary (See below for answer)

1. How long are benefits available to the WIC participant?
2. Can we see if the benefits are expired?
3. Do cashiers need to know what is on the shopper’s card?

Answers:

1. How long are benefits available to the WIC participant?
 - a. WIC benefits are typically valid for 30 days. Unused benefits do not roll over to the next month.

2. Can we see if the benefits are expired?
 - a. A shopper can check their available balance and benefit expiration date in many ways. Expiration dates and remaining food balance can be found on each transaction receipt, by running a balance inquiry on your cash register or stand-beside device, via the WICShopper app, by calling the Customer Service Line on the back of their card, by calling their Local WIC Agency and by signing into their account online.
3. Do cashiers need to know what is on the shopper's card?
 - a. No, the cashier is not required to know what benefits are on the eWIC card. The point of sale system, whether integrated or stand-beside, identifies foods that are WIC-approved AND items that are included on the household's benefits.

Section 3. Shopping and Transactions

Question Summary (See below for answer)

1. Does the WIC family have to buy all of their benefits at the same time?
2. Do WIC-approved items need to be separated?
3. Can coupons and loyalty cards be used during an eWIC transaction?
4. Is the eWIC card the same as the SNAP card?
5. How do cashiers ring up fruits and vegetables?
6. What does "Qty Not Available" mean?
7. What does "Not WIC Approved" mean?
8. Can cashiers or managers override the system?
9. What if the shopper wishes to pay with eWIC and SNAP?
10. What if the WIC program does not pay the entire amount for an item?
11. How many times can someone enter their PIN?
12. How can I run a transaction if the card won't swipe?
13. Can I run a transaction without the eWIC card?

Answers:

1. Does the WIC family have to buy all of their food benefits at the same time?
 - a. No. WIC households can buy as little or as much of their household benefits as they would like before they expire.
2. Do WIC-approved items need to be separated?
 - a. If your store uses a stand-beside device provided by FIS, then yes, WIC approved foods must be purchased separately from non-WIC approved foods. If your store uses an integrated cash register system then non-WIC and WIC approved foods may be purchased in a single transaction.
3. Can coupons and loyalty cards be used during an eWIC transaction?
 - a. Yes. WIC shoppers are encouraged to take advantage of coupons and store loyalty cards.
4. Is the eWIC card the same as the SNAP card?
 - a. No. Each program has their own funding source, EBT card and benefits, and they are administered by separate agencies.

5. How do cashiers ring up fruits and vegetables?
 - a. Stand-beside stores need to manually enter the sale amount per fruit or vegetable towards the end of the transaction as an “FVV” benefit. Integrated stores enter the PLU of the fruit or vegetable which is the closest matching type of produce to the item. Integrated stores which sell fruits and vegetables with custom UPCs may also need to map those UPCs in their POS to the closest PLU. Integrated stores are recommended to contact their point of sale provider for further details.
6. What does “Qty Not Available” mean?
 - a. Qty Not Available comes up on stand-beside devices to notify cashiers that the eWIC card balance does not have enough to cover the purchase of that item. For example, if the card has 14 ounces of breakfast cereal the shopper cannot purchase an 18 ounce cereal because the household benefit is 4 ounces short.
7. What does “Not WIC Approved” mean?
 - a. Not WIC Approved comes up on stand-beside devices to notify cashiers that the item just scanned is not on the APL, which means it is not a WIC approved item.
8. Can cashiers or managers override the system?
 - a. No, the WIC program will only pay for food items listed on the APL, and that are included in the household’s benefits.
9. What if the shopper wishes to pay with eWIC and SNAP?
 - a. If your store uses the stand-beside device, only eWIC benefits can be used to purchase eWIC foods. If your store has an integrated cash register system which allows for multiple forms of payment, the eWIC card must be the first method of payment. Otherwise, WIC may not be applied to the foods purchased. The SNAP card can be used after eWIC.
10. What if the WIC program does not pay the entire amount for an item?
 - a. The shopper should never be asked to pay any amount not covered by the WIC program except if they go over their fruit and vegetable benefit.
11. How many times can someone enter their PIN?
 - a. An eWIC card is locked after four failed PIN attempts. PIN means Personal Identification Number. If an eWIC card is locked, the shopper can call the Customer Service Line on the back of their card to reset their PIN.
12. How can I run a transaction if the card won’t swipe?
 - a. Most cash register systems will allow a cashier to enter the card number manually. If the card is damaged, please request that the shopper order a new card.
13. Can I run a transaction without the eWIC card?
 - a. WIC foods can only be purchased with the card present. Under no circumstances should a WIC transaction occur without the physical card. This means photos of the card or memorized card numbers are not allowed by the WIC Program.

Section 4. Customer Shopping Experience

Question Summary (See below for answer)

1. Is photo identification or a signature required?
2. Can someone else shop for the WIC participant?
3. Is the Alaska eWIC card accepted in other states?
4. Is eWIC allowed at self-checkout?
5. What is the WICShopper app?
6. Can eWIC purchases be refunded?
7. Can substitutions be provided if the store is out of a specific food?

Answers:

1. Is photo identification or signatures required?
 - a. No form of ID or proof of signature should be required. The shopper only needs their eWIC card and to know their PIN (also known as Personal Identification Number).
2. Can someone else shop for the WIC participant?
 - a. Yes. Anyone can shop for the household as long as they have the physical eWIC card and know the PIN.
3. Is the Alaska eWIC card accepted in other states?
 - a. No. The Alaska eWIC card can only be used at State of Alaska WIC authorized stores within Alaska's borders.
4. Is eWIC allowed at self-checkout?
 - a. Only if the store has been set up and approved by the WIC Program for accepting the card at self-checkouts. Ask at the customer service desk.
5. What is the WICShopper app?
 - a. The State of Alaska WIC program now offers the WICShopper app for public use. Anyone can download the app for free. Features included are:



- Scan Barcode: allows anyone to scan a barcode using their phone's camera to see if it is listed on the APL and therefore a WIC approved item (users with a registered eWIC card number can use this feature to identify food items that they would be eligible to purchase with benefits remaining on their household eWIC card)
- Key Enter UPC: Similar to the "Scan Barcode" feature but instead of using the camera on the phone, would allow the user to manually type in a UPC number
- My Benefits: Lists the available food balance on the eWIC card that is registered to the app (this feature will list no benefits if there is no eWIC card registered)
- WIC Allowable Foods: Visual of our Alaska WIC Food List
- I couldn't buy this!: Allows the public to submit product information for inclusion in the WIC APL (products must be reviewed by WIC nutritionists to determine eligibility)
- WIC Stores: Helps the public locate WIC approved vendors

- Find a WIC Office: Helps the public locate WIC clinics
 - Manage Cards: Allows the user to register more than one card
 - And more
6. Can eWIC purchases be refunded?
 - a. No. However, shoppers can exchange WIC foods for identical UPC items if they are damaged or spoiled. Under no circumstances should cash be provided to eWIC shoppers for foods paid with WIC funds.
 7. Can substitutions be provided if the store is out of a specific food?
 - a. No. Substitutions are considered fraud. Under no circumstances can a cashier provide a product that was not scanned and approved for WIC. If a shopper would like an item that is not WIC approved, they will need to pay for the item using other payment methods.

Section 5. Vendor Tasks

Question Summary (See below for answer)

1. What if I find a lost eWIC card?
2. How will stores be trained for eWIC?
3. Who should stores call if they have issues with eWIC?
4. What if an item isn't scanning as WIC approved?
5. Since a WIC shopper doesn't have to buy all their foods at the same time, is it okay if my store is out of inventory on some WIC required foods today?
6. Does the vendor need to have a WIC POS and trained staff on duty during all hours that the store is open?

Answers:

1. What if I find a lost eWIC card?
 - a. Mail it to State of Alaska-DHSS-WIC, PO Box 110612, Juneau, AK 99811
2. How will stores be trained for eWIC?
 - a. The State of Alaska WIC program offers annual training at which time eWIC training is provided. Additional store trainings may be provided as needed or upon request. Training materials can be requested from the WIC Vendor Management Unit at any time via email to wic@alaska.gov, via fax to (907) 465-3416 or via phone at (907) 465-3100. Some training materials may be found on our website here: <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dpa/Pages/nutri/wic/vendors/default.aspx>.
3. Who should stores call if they have issues with eWIC?
 - a. Integrated stores should contact their corporate headquarters, third-party processors or point of sale providers.
 - b. Stand-beside stores should call the FIS Helpdesk number listed on the device.
4. What if an item isn't scanning as eWIC approved?
 - a. Double check the Approved Products List (APL) to confirm the UPC, brand, flavor and size match an item listed.
 - b. Verify the eWIC card has the correct benefit category and amount available
 - c. If the issue is still not resolved, contact the WIC State Office.

5. Since a WIC shopper doesn't have to buy all their foods at the same time, is it okay if my store is out of inventory on some WIC required foods today?
 - a. *No!* WIC authorized vendors are required to have at least the minimum required amount of WIC foods in the store at all times. It is important to carefully order enough WIC inventory to supply the participants, as well as community members, who regularly shop at the store.
6. Does the vendor need to have a WIC POS and trained staff on duty during all hours that the store is open?
 - a. Yes. This is a requirement of your vendor agreement. Participants may not be required to wait for trained staff to come in, or to come back at another time – at least one register must be open for WIC during all store hours.