



Food and
Nutrition
Service

August 26, 2020

SUBJECT: Request for WIC Flexibility in Response to COVID-19

1320
Braddock
Place
Alexandria,
VA
22314

TO: Jesus Mendoza, Jr.
Regional Administrator
Western Regional Office

This letter is in response to information California WIC sent as follow up to its Routine Monitoring Waiver requesting a regulatory waiver from a requirement of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) that the State agency cannot meet due to COVID-19.

California WIC requests a waiver of the federal requirement that the State agency must conduct routine monitoring visits on a minimum of five percent of the number of vendors authorized by the State agency as of October 1 of each fiscal year, as outlined in 7 CFR 246.12(j)(2). Pursuant to the authority granted in section 2204(a)(1) of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (P.L. 116-127), USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) waives this annual requirement for the current federal fiscal year.

Given the recommendations by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to control the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic through means of social distancing, USDA FNS understands that on-site monitoring of vendors requiring WIC and store employees to interact creates an undesirable risk. Additionally, USDA FNS recognizes that State and local travel restrictions may also affect the State agency's ability to complete on-site routine monitoring visits. A waiver of the annual minimum requirement for routine monitoring visits removes a requirement that the State agency cannot currently meet due to COVID-19, and is necessary to ensure participant access to supplemental foods.

This waiver is only applicable to regulations at:

- 7 CFR 246.12(j)(2) which requires WIC State agencies to conduct routine monitoring visits on a minimum of five percent of the number of vendors authorized by the State agency as of October 1 of each fiscal year in order to survey the types and levels of abuse and errors among authorized vendors and to take corrective actions, as appropriate.

While operating under this waiver, California WIC is expected to ensure continued quality oversight and monitoring of its authorized vendors, and to begin developing and/or implementing alternative methods to survey the types and levels of abuse and errors among authorized vendors. For example, an alternative method could include the State agency completing virtual visits after obtaining a waiver from the on-site requirement for routine monitoring visits. Within 30 days of the public health emergency and applicable State and local

travel orders being lifted, the State agency must resume routine monitoring. The State agency must notify the Regional Office when it resumes routine monitoring.

The waiver authority of P.L. 116-127 requires, at section 2204(b), that the State agency submit a report which includes a summary of the use of this waiver and a description of whether this waiver resulted in improved services to women, infants, and children. The State agency shall provide the Regional Office with this report no later than 1 year after the date of approval.

USDA FNS appreciates California WIC's commitment to addressing the operational challenges impeding the delivery of WIC benefits to women, infants, and children in need.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah Widor". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

SARAH WIDOR
Director
Supplemental Food Programs Division