

**Illinois WIC Program Nutrition Practice Standards (NPS)**  
**WIC Staff Breastfeeding Competencies**  
**February 2021**

Nutrition Practice Standards are provided to assist staff in translating policy into practice. This guidance is intended to be used in conjunction with the Illinois WIC Policy and Procedure manual to assist in ensuring effective, accurate, and health-promoting nutrition assistance is provided to Illinois WIC participants. Below are the competencies expected of WIC staff regarding breastfeeding promotion and support.

## **Staff Competencies**

### **Promoting the WIC Philosophy for Achieving Breastfeeding Success**

Each local agency is required to incorporate task-appropriate breastfeeding promotion and support training into orientation programs and annual agency in-services for all staff involved with WIC participants. Staff at all levels should be competent in basic breastfeeding knowledge, understand their role in supporting breastfeeding with families, and understand how to implement the WIC philosophy for achieving breastfeeding success.

#### **All WIC staff will:**

- Understand their role in promoting and supporting the WIC and agency philosophy for achieving breastfeeding success.
- Recognize their own beliefs and attitudes regarding breastfeeding and the impact of those beliefs and attitudes on WIC participant decisions.
- Self-identify as part of the WIC “Team” that promotes, protects, and supports the breastfeeding relationship.
- Understand how the WIC food packages for the breastfeeding dyad support breastfeeding.
- Develop rapport and foster open dialogue to successfully communicate with pregnant women and mothers.
- Consider that all pregnant women will breastfeed, and all new mothers are breastfeeding, thereby assuming breastfeeding as the “normal” and expected method of infant feeding.
- Encourage all women to exclusively initiate breastfeeding and to continue breastfeeding for at least one year and as long thereafter as both mom and baby desire, emphasizing the value of continuing to breastfeed after returning to work or school.
- Use breastfeeding-friendly questions in all initial contacts, e.g.: How is breastfeeding going? How can I help you with breastfeeding?

#### **Competent Professional Authority (CPA) Competencies:**

Breastfeeding competencies are expected for issuance of breastfeeding food packages in the Illinois WIC Program. CPA should have a thorough knowledge of:

- factors that can impact breastfeeding during the prenatal assessment process, including physiological factors that impact breastfeeding;
- normal lactation and optimal breastfeeding practices that help mothers initiate and maintain breastfeeding;
- the benefits of breastfeeding and the mechanisms underlying these benefits, barriers breastfeeding women face, and the advantages for infants, mothers, families, and society from breastfeeding, i.e. health, nutritional, immunologic, developmental, psychological, social, economic, and environmental advantages and benefits;
- routine breastfeeding questions and problems, what to expect in the first two weeks after delivery, signs that breastfeeding is not going well, strategies for development of good milk supply and ability to provide positive support to breastfeeding mothers;

- hand expression techniques, how to educate participants on its benefits and use, when to recommend it to participants and the ability to provide ongoing support and counseling to participants using hand expression;
- importance of exclusive breastfeeding, consequences of giving artificial nipples or pacifiers and supplemental formula on milk supply and long-term outcomes and the detrimental effects of early formula supplementation e.g., potential for future chronic disease;
- strategies for continuing to breastfeed after returning to work;
- available agency breast pumps, including operation of pump and ability to assess mother's need and appropriate type of pump to issue;
- common breastfeeding concerns and local agency protocols for referral to additional assistance for mothers in a variety of situations.
- the role of clinic and community support for breastfeeding;
- the current Illinois WIC Breastfeeding food packages, including policies on issuance and documentation.

Correctly assess and document a participant's breastfeeding status per the *NPS Breastfeeding*, including:

1. Assessment of mother's intent to exclusively, partially or minimally breastfeed and understanding of the mother's plan/goal for breastfeeding;
2. Assessing how the breastfeeding experience is going explaining the risks of routine supplementation, providing appropriate counseling, including the differences in the maternal food packages and the use of powdered infant formula;
3. Correctly updating breastfeeding information in the I-WIC system, following the I-WIC user manual, when changing a breastfed infant's food package;
4. Appropriate assignment of the breastfeeding dyad food package.

Provide breastfeeding dyad education per NPS Breastfeeding, including:

1. Using culturally appropriate breastfeeding promotion, education and support strategies;
2. Using evidence based and up-to-date information about breastfeeding technique and management to encourage and support the breastfeeding mother and infant;
3. Identifying and addressing individual needs and concerns about breastfeeding.

## Issuing Breast Pumps

Any staff issuing a breast pump is responsible for:

- Proper assessment of participant's need for a pump; staff should understand that breast pumps are needed in certain circumstances, but all women do not require a pump to successfully breastfeed.
- Being educated about the availability of and general requirement for distributing breast pumps, including pumps available through Medicaid reimbursement for eligible participants.
- Providing the correct type of pump to a participant, either a loaned pump (only multi-user pumps (electric) should be loaned to participants), or a given pump (all other types of pumps).
- Documenting in the WIC MIS the reason for issuing the pump and the type of pump issued in the breastfeeding mother's record. Additional information related to pump education, summary of counseling and plans for follow-up should be documented in the Breastfeeding notes. Follow up within 24 hours is recommended to assure pump is operating correctly and mother is using it properly.
- Maintaining a secure inventory of breast pumps and kits.
- Cleaning and maintaining re-usable breast pumps.
- Guiding the participant through the lease agreement, release form and their responsibilities. Ensuring the participant signs a release form and loan agreement for multi-user electric pumps.
  - Scan the agreement into the participant's record and participant provided a signed copy of the agreement
- Upon participant returning loaned pump, update in the WIC MIS or log to reflect that the pump has been returned to the agency.