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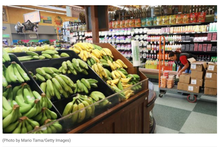
CORONAVIRUS

Sparse Shelves Add To Challenge For Those On SNAP, WIC Benefits

Apr 1, 2020, 8:38 PM | Updated: 8:39 pm



(Photo by Mario Tama/Getty Images)

BY SHELBY HINTZE, KSL TV

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KSL TV Live

SALT LAKE CITY, Utah – More than 206,000 Utahns rely on SNAP or WIC benefits to feed their families. That number is expected to grow. Sparse grocery shelves have added even more challenges for program participants.

Amanda Hyde and her husband, Keenan, have a daughter who spent 102 days in the NICU, and while healthy now, still requires a lot of extra care.

They use both SNAP and WIC benefits to get by.

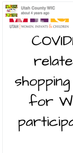
Most stores in Utah do not accept SNAP or WIC for online grocery shopping or pickup, making shopping with a high-risk baby difficult and dangerous.

Hyde said even before COVID-19, she had a hard time finding the specific items she is allowed to use her WIC checks on.

She had a request for the average shopper.

"I would just say, don't shop like your life depends on it, because you can get as much as you want," Hyde said. "They (SNAP and WIC participants) can only get certain items."

WIC participants get a checkbook every month with a very specific set of items they can use their benefits to purchase. The checks often specify the item, brand and size they can buy. When those items are gone, the participant has to go to another store or ask the store to substitute another product.



There have been calls on social media to limit the number of WIC-qualified products other people buy, similar to the way many grocery stores have specified senior-only hours.

Not found

> Hi folks! When you're at the grocery store for your hoarding needs, please try to leave items labeled "WIC" alone. There's some ridiculous restrictions on what people on WIC can get, so if the store is out of the stuff it can be used on, people who need it can't get food.
>
> — Sara Luterman (@sluterman) March 28, 2020

"They're the store name brands of canned goods. They're the cheaper end of the breads. They're the whole wheat breads, specifically, and stuff like fruit and stuff. That's going to be fine with WIC participants. It's just the canned foods and the breads, the milks, the juices, and cereal, like Malt O' Meal," said Hyde.

Stores can also limit the number of checks someone can use per transaction. Stores have been extra busy, often with long lines of shoppers, and WIC checks can take longer to checkout.

Some WIC checks have more than one item on them and if the participant doesn't get all the items, they forfeit the other items. If a store is sold out of one of the items on a check, the participant has to forfeit it or try to find all the other items at another store.

When it comes to SNAP benefits, there has been a growing concern about what the summertime will bring.

"I'm interested to see if they do any farmers markets this summer," Hyde said.

SNAP participants can double their benefits when they shop at farmer's markets. With the uncertainty of what the summer is going to look like, that could be a large blow to local farmers and low income families.

There have been some calls on social media for people to hold off on their shopping in the first few days of the month, when SNAP benefits renew. In Utah, those SNAP benefit refills are staggered throughout the month, so there isn't a run in the first couple days.

If you think you could benefit from some extra support, especially right now, call 211 to be connected with someone who can help you figure out your eligibility and walk you through the application process.

Changes have been announced to help WIC recipients over the short term. Items such as bread, milk, eggs and yogurt can now be substituted if the store is out of the specific WIC approved item, brand or size.

Most WIC clinics will now do appointments over the phone, as well. For all the latest, go to wic.utah.gov and click the Coronavirus Update tab at the top of the page.

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