

Electronic cards to make WIC easier to use

29 February 2016, by Mary Clare Jalonick

Pregnant women and parents using the Women, Infants and Children program will have an easier time buying food at the grocery store.

The Agriculture Department is announcing Monday that it will require states to transition from paper vouchers to electronic cards over the next five years. WIC will now use the same type of Electronic Benefits Transfer, or EBT, cards used by food stamp recipients.

Around half of the nation's infants benefit from WIC. The program offers grants to states to provide [food vouchers](#) to low-income [pregnant women](#), women who have recently given birth and infants and children up to age 5 who are found to be at nutritional risk. Only a handful of nutritional foods are allowed, such as whole grains, low-fat dairy and fruits and vegetables.

The change will allow those using WIC to shop for items as they need them instead of requiring them to purchase all items in one trip, as is the case with the paper [vouchers](#). USDA says using the electronic cards, which are similar to ATM or credit cards, also reduces the stigma associated with using food benefits.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said the change will "allow WIC participants to shop conveniently and check out confidently."

The change to electronic cards was first required in a 2010 child nutrition law.

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