

# WIC participation associated with improved birth outcomes, lower infant mortality

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A systematic review of the most recently available evidence has found that participation in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is likely associated with improved

birth outcomes and lower infant mortality. In addition, participation in WIC may increase receipt of child preventative services, such as vaccines. The review is published in *Annals of Internal Medicine*.

The WIC program provides supplemental foods, nutrition education and breastfeeding support, screening and referrals to medical and social services, and support for high-risk pregnancies to low-income women and children younger than five years of age. Because of its services and referrals, participation in WIC has potential to impact health of mothers and infants, and reduce economic, racial, or ethnic disparities in adverse outcomes. This latest review of the evidence focuses on maternal and child outcomes and whether they differ by enrollee characteristics or by duration of enrollment in the WIC program.

Researchers from Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine conducted a systematic review of studies of WIC-eligible mothers and children under the age of five, as part of an evidence report commissioned by the USDA to examine the most recent evidence. The authors report on the results of studies focused on maternal mortality, maternal morbidity, maternal pregnancy outcomes, maternal health behaviors, maternal health care utilization, birth and neonatal outcomes, and infant and child health outcomes. The review included 20 studies. The results showed that maternal WIC participation is likely to be associated with lower risk for preterm birth, low birthweight, and infant mortality.

The authors also found that the risk of low birthweight or preterm birth was reduced, though they report that the risk reduction magnitude is more modest than previously reported. The strength of evidence was low or insufficient to determine outcomes by race or ethnicity of enrollees or duration of enrollment in WIC. No studies reported on the association of WIC participation with maternal mortality.

**More information:** Maternal, Infant, and Child Health Outcomes Associated with the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, *Annals of Internal Medicine* (2022). [DOI: 10.7326/M22-0604](https://doi.org/10.7326/M22-0604)

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