

Families may be missing out on valuable nutrition benefits because they delay signing up for the Women Infants & Children program (WIC).

These families apparently do not realize they can enroll in WIC as soon as a woman becomes pregnant. No waiting for a pregnancy confirmation. No waiting for the birth. Seminole Tribe members are eligible.

Only 80 percent of 58,750 Broward residents who are eligible for WIC participate in the program. For the rest, it's a missed opportunity, says Dr. Paula Thaqi, director of the Florida Department of Health in Broward County, which operates WIC locally.

"Some women do not enroll early," Thaqi says. "We want women to sign up when they learn they are pregnant so they can receive WIC benefits right away. WIC helps mothers, babies and young children be healthier."

Services include nutrition counseling, breastfeeding counseling, referrals to other programs and an electronic benefits card to buy nutritious food and artificial baby milk, if necessary.

What foods are covered? Cereal, whole grains (bread, rice, tortillas, pasta), canned tuna and salmon, fruits and vegetables, baby foods, eggs, milk, yogurt, cheese, peanut butter, beans, fruit juice and more.

WIC serves pregnant women, mothers for six months after delivery, breastfeeding women and children under age 5.

Families are eligible if household income is below 185 percent of the federal poverty level. That means monthly income under \$1,860 for one person, \$2,504 for two, \$3,793 for a family of four, etc. Florida Medicaid recipients qualify automatically.

In addition to nutrition services, DOH-Broward offers free dental fluoride varnish to children up to age 20 in WIC-eligible families. The treatment, which comes in kid-friendly flavors and is painted onto the teeth, prevents cavities.

All WIC services are available at the seven Broward offices in Hollywood, Pembroke Pines, Fort Lauderdale, Pompano Beach, Coral Springs and Lauderdale Lakes.

For more information call 954-767-5111 or visit broward.floridahealth.gov. Appointments are available.

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