

Local Agency Panel: Lessons Learned in an Emergency

Heather Sanders, Public Health Consultant

State of Michigan: WIC Division

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EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS



WIC Policy 1.12 Emergency/Disaster Planning Coordination

Purpose: To provide local WIC agencies direction in meeting the needs of WIC applicants and clients **prior to**, **during**, and **following** an emergency period, supply chain disruption, or supplemental food recall.

WIC Policy 1.12 Emergency/Disaster Planning Coordination

- The local agency must have an emergency/disaster plan that includes:
 - A copy of the health department or organization's emergency/disaster preparedness plan, to include contingency plans for delivery of services in an emergency/disaster.
 - Local government/community agency emergency/disaster contact information.
 - Name and contact information for local WIC agency person(s) designated to serve as the emergency/disaster contact(s) and be responsible for coordinating with the non-WIC local and state WIC emergency/disaster contacts.



WIC Policy 1.12 Emergency/Disaster Planning Coordination Continued

- State and local WIC agency and staff contact information.
- A communication plan for keeping the State WIC agency and WIC clients informed during an emergency/disaster, including notifications related to service disruption, relocation, and availability of WIC services.



Local Agency Panel:

- Health Department of Northwest Michigan
 - Amy Parish, BSN, RN, WIC Coordinator
 - Carey Squires, Clerk/Tech Supervisor
- District Health Department #10
 - Diane Shelton, RD, LD, CLS WIC Supervisor, BFPC Coordinator
- Washtenaw County Health Department
 - Gayathri Akella, MS, RD, CLC, WIC Supervisor



Providing WIC Services in an Emergency or Disaster: Health Department of Northwest Michigan

Carey Squires, WIC PHT Supervisor & Amy Parish, WIC Coordinator

c.squires@nwhealth.org / a.parish@nwhealth.org



Providing WIC Services in an Emergency or Disaster

- What experience has your agency had with emergencies or disaster?
 - Gaylord experienced an EF3 tornado on May 20, 2022.
 - Northern Michigan had a devastating ice storm the end of March this year. The damage was the worst in Gaylord, but it also extended to all four of our local health department counties.
 - Our Health Officer is the primary contact who then communicates with our leadership staff to let everyone know about emergencies.
 - Leadership reaches out to staff to alert them of an emergency and what actions to take so that both staff and clients are safe.





2022 Tornado in Gaylord



Providing WIC Services in an Emergency or Disaster



2025 Northern Michigan Ice Storm





2025 MICHIGAN WIC COORDINATOR SUMMIT

Providing WIC Services in an Emergency or Disaster

- How prepared was your agency for an emergency or disaster?
 - The tornado happened fast, but we sent a Be Alert to all staff to take cover and be safe.
 - We feel more prepared since COVID. It seems like anything can be accomplished now.
 - Our leadership team has a plan that we follow and make it work, ensuring all staff are safe and accounted for.
 - Having the capability to send blast messages through WIC makes it easier to contact clients to let them know of office closures. We have also called clients to make sure they don't come into the office if they had an appointment scheduled. Staff made sure clients were safe and to let us know if they needed anything.



Communication Through Social Media Platforms

Health Department of Northwest Michigan

May 25, 2022 · 🌐

Attention Gaylord WIC clients: If your WIC food benefits were lost or damaged in the tornado, please contact us at 800-432-4121. We can assist you in replacing your benefit cards!

For additional tornado relief information visit the Gaylord Area Chamber of Commerce webpage - <https://bit.ly/3PFP2xH>



Gaylord WIC Clients:

Lost or damaged WIC food benefits due to the tornado?

Call us at 800-432-4121.



HEALTH
DEPARTMENT
of Northwest Michigan

Health Department of Northwest Michigan
May 25, 2022 · 🌐

Providing WIC Services in an Emergency or Disaster

- What has your agency done to prepare for an emergency or disaster?
 - We have a workplace safety committee that ensures policies and procedures are up to date.
 - Annually have a meeting with staff to perform emergency situations so they are prepared and know how to handle different situations.
 - We have monthly random tests of the Be Alert system. All staff need to respond to ensure it is working properly.
 - Leadership communicates any leave time to make sure program needs are covered in case of an emergency.



Providing WIC Services in an Emergency or Disaster

- What tips do you recommend to agencies to be better prepared for a future emergency/disaster?
 - Document any changes that are made in WIC, for example, reissuing of lost benefits or a note on why benefits cannot be reissued.
 - Some clients were without power for 10-20 days and had no way to keep food cold, so some things spoiled. We looked in WIC Direct to see when the items were purchased and what could be re-issued.
 - Just remain calm and communicate!
 - Make sure staff is educated on what the next steps are so they know what to expect.
 - Reach out to clients the best you can to make sure they have what they need.



Providing WIC Services in an Emergency or Disaster: District Health Department #10

Diane Shelton

WIC Supervisor/Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Manager

dshelton@dhd10.org



Providing WIC Services in an Emergency or Disaster

- **What experience has your agency had with emergencies or disaster?**
 - DHD#10 has had power outages and incidences where we have had to re-locate or close services. Also, most of us will remember the emergency response to Covid, as well as formula shortages. When I worked in WIC in Georgia, we had an experience with receiving displaced disaster victims from Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, LA.
- **If you are part of a Health Department was the Emergency Preparedness team and Emergency Preparedness Coordinator involved with assisting or directing WIC staff with the emergency?**
 - At DHD#10, in the case of power outages and other emergencies, these were isolated and did not involve the Emergency Preparedness team, however, we have developed a COOP (Continuity of Operations Plan) specifically for WIC (and each department) if we must relocate. During Covid, we did have the EP coordinator directing all staff.



Providing WIC Services in an Emergency or Disaster

- If you are part of a Health Department was the Emergency Preparedness team and Emergency Preparedness Coordinator involved with assisting or directing WIC staff with the emergency?
 - In Georgia when Hurricane Katrina hit, our Emergency Preparedness Team (we termed it ICS) and the Emergency Operations Center were activated, included myself and many other leadership and administrative staff. We were involved in the planning for the response to the emergency in different ICS roles. The incident commanders were involved in directing all staff during the emergency, but each department was able to plan for their program as appropriate.



Providing WIC Services in an Emergency or Disaster

- **How prepared was your agency for an emergency or disaster?**
 - I would say in both DHD#10 and the agency in Georgia, we were prepared in some ways due to exercises that the staff does. The structure was in place, but the responses are very dependent on the situation. Some disaster response may be dependent on the Emergency management in the geographic location, and some may be managed more independently by agencies.
- **What did you miss, or could you have done to improve the response?**
 - I believe what is missed most often is change management when priorities shift. This can really affect the morale of the staff. One other thing that can be done to improve the response is a close relationship with community partners and resources.



Providing WIC Services in an Emergency or Disaster

- **What has your agency done to prepare for an emergency or disaster (exercises)?**
 - Most recently at DHD#10 all staff participated in regional exercises where we were given a scenario where the clinic staff was displaced. We then developed a list of items that we would need which was dependent on where we were re-located to. We often have exercises such as active shooter situations, fire drills and other emergency situations.
 - In Georgia, one exercise that we did, prior to the Covid emergency, was a mass treatment exercise after bioterrorism event. This was a mass vaccination exercise done as a drive-through dispensing site. This tested our emergency preparedness structure, including the emergency operations center and staff, coordination with partner agencies, conducting an exercise at a large public facility where we had an agreement.





Providing WIC Services in an Emergency or Disaster

- **What tips do you recommend to agencies to be better prepared for a future emergency/disaster?**
 - Take recommended Emergency Preparedness Training - FEMA
 - Develop a good relationship with your Administration, Emergency Preparedness staff and community stakeholders
 - Ensure you are “at the table” when decisions are made
 - Be familiar with the Michigan WIC Continuity of Operations Plan, and have one for your agency that is actionable
 - Provide information and communication between the layers of administration in your agency and keep the front-line staff well informed.
 - Practice and train

Providing WIC Services in an Emergency or Disaster

Gayathri Akella

Washtenaw County WIC Coordinator/Supervisor

Email: akellag@washtenaw.org

734-544-6794 (Desk Phone)

745-5453139 (Cell Phone)





Emergency & Disaster Experience

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Washtenaw County declared a three-month state of emergency starting on March 2020 to June 2020 as Act of God clause. During the three-month period under the “Act of God” clause, county employees were directed to remain at home due to the lockdown. They continued to receive their regular pay without being required to work. Any employees who did perform work during this period were compensated at the overtime rate.

How did your agency maintain timely client services without depleting resources during the emergency?

Utilized a fan-out sheet to ensure rapid and effective communication with all staff.

Sent blast messages to clients with emergency updates and benefit information.

Began with 5% of staff managing all appointments in March, gradually increasing to 15% in April, 25% in May, and transitioning to 100% virtual services in June once the Act of God period ended.

This phased approach was effective because workload was reduced without labs.

Phone greetings were regularly updated to reflect our evolving work plan and keep clients informed.

Towner Building - CLOSURE

08/09/2024



Tammy Richards

To I-townerbldgsite

Cc Jean Amador; Sally Amos O'Neal; Gregory Dill; Michelle Billard

You forwarded this message on 8/9/2024 2:36 PM.

Good afternoon,

Please be advised out of abundance of caution, staff is hereby instructed to leave the Towner Facility due to a potential threat in the surrounding area. Local law enforcement is addressing. This is not targeted against the County.

Thank you

Tammy

Tammy Richards

Washtenaw County Risk Management

220 N. Main Street | P.O. Box 8645 | Ann Arbor, MI 48107-8645

734-222-6737 – desk | 734-222-6758 – fax | 734-355-1191– cell

www.ewashtenaw.org



Fri 8/9/2024 2:33 PM

Hostile Client



COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

220 N. MAIN STREET P.O. BOX 8645
ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN 48107-8645

To: Staff and Leadership of Towner Campus and Annex

From: Gregory Dill, County Administrator

Date: November 21, 2024

Re: November 21 Security Incident and Response

At approximately 7:30 AM this morning, a credible security threat was made by a CMH client against the County. Emergency response protocols were enacted based upon the serious nature of the threat. Law enforcement was called and officers were dispatched to the Towner and Annex buildings. Both buildings were temporarily locked-down in accordance with protocol.

CMH staff and our law enforcement partners quickly secured the individual and they are no longer a threat. Given this, the buildings at the Towner and Annex Campuses are determined to be safe and have resumed normal operations.

Our top priority is always the safety and well-being of all staff. We take all threats seriously and encourage staff to continue to report them when they occur. I am grateful for the calm cooperation by staff at the impacted locations. This is the second such time that an emergency response at the Towner Campus has been required in the past two months, and accordingly we are reviewing our internal processes and responses to ensure that Washtenaw County can continue to provide a safe working environment for our employees, and safely deliver services to the public.

Thank you for your understanding and role in maintaining our safety.

Security threat!

The building experienced an emergency closure in the afternoon while WIC clinic services were underway.





Washtenaw County Health Department

Washtenaw County Health Department is responsible for this Page

555 Towner St, Ypsilanti, MI, United States, Michigan

(734) 544-6700

health@washtenaw.org

washtenaw.org/health

Open now

96% recommend (43 Reviews)

Photos

See all photos



Write a comment...



Washtenaw County Health Department

August 9, 2024

The Washtenaw County Health Department's offices at the 555 Towner site are closed for the remainder of the day today, Fri, Aug 9, due to an unexpected building closure. We will reopen on Mon, Aug 12.

The 555 Towner building is

CLOSED

Fri, Aug 9

for the remainder of the day. We will reopen Mon, Aug 12.



10/17/2024: Bomb Threat!

The building experienced an emergency closure in the afternoon while WIC clinic services were underway.



COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

220 N. MAIN STREET P.O. BOX 8645
ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN 48107-8645

To: Staff and Leadership of Towner Campus

From: Gregory Dill, County Administrator

Date: October 17, 2024

Re: Safety precaution taken following unfounded **threat**

Earlier this afternoon, a **bomb threat** was left on a voicemail line of the Public Health Department. As soon as the **threat** was discovered by a member of our nursing staff, the Washtenaw County Sheriff's Office was contacted to investigate the **threat**. To ensure the safety of everyone on the Towner campus, we immediately evacuated 555 Towner 1, 555 Towner 2 and 750 Towner.

The investigation by the Sheriff's Office identified the source of the message, the **threat** was determined to be unfounded, and an all clear was issued. Given this, the buildings at the Towner Campus are determined to be safe and will be open tomorrow for normal operations.

Our top priority is always the safety and well-being of all staff. We take all threats seriously and encourage staff to continue to report them when they occur.

We will keep you updated on relevant information as it becomes available. Thank you for your cooperation and understanding.

Best,

Intro

Making Washtenaw County #HealthyTogether

Page · Medical & health

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Open now

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Photos

See all photos



Write a comment...



Washtenaw County Health Department

October 17, 2024

The Washtenaw County Health Department's offices at the 555 Towner site are closed for the remainder of the day today, Thurs, 10/17, due to an unexpected building emergency. We will reopen on Fri, 10/18.

The 555 Towner building is

CLOSED

Thurs, 10/17 for the remainder of the day. We will reopen Fri, 10/18.



During the unexpected building closure in the afternoon, the following steps were taken to ensure continuity of services and communication:

- Received notification of the closure via email and calls through the fan-out sheet.
- Informed all clients that remaining appointments would be completed virtually the following day.
- Posted clear signage on the building to notify walk-in clients of the emergency closure.
- Added a temporary phone greeting to inform callers of the closure and provide next steps.
- Called all scheduled clients; if there was no answer and no voicemail option, sent on-demand notifications.
- Issued benefits to all eligible clients to minimize service disruption.





COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR
GREGORY DILL

220 N Main St | Ann Arbor, MI | 48104

Winter Storm-closed for two days

County Leaders and Community Partners,

Earlier today I met with leaders from Emergency Management, OCED, CMH, Health, and the Shelter Association. Out of an abundance of caution for the safety of County staff, clients, and community members I have made the decision to close non-essential County operations on Tuesday, January 21, 2025.

Extreme cold temperatures are expected through Washtenaw County beginning the evening of Sunday, January 19 through mid-day Wednesday, January 22. The National Weather Service is projecting wind chills between -10 to -20 degrees. Anyone outdoors during this period will be at risk as frostbite will set in quickly.

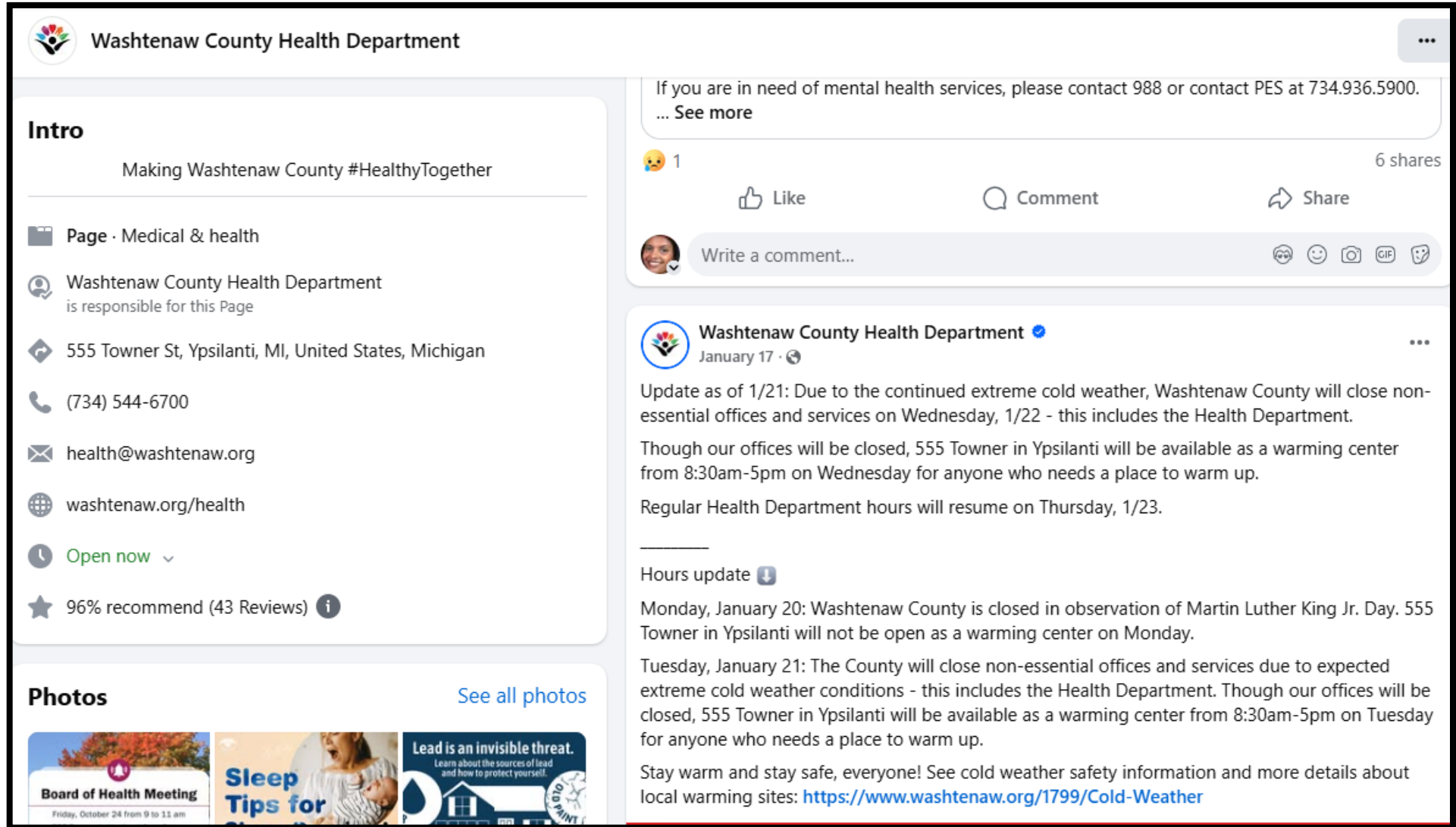
My team and I are coordinating with Dan Kelly at the Shelter Association on ensuring information on warming sites are widely available to our community. Location sites can be found below and more information from the Shelter Association of Washtenaw County on how to access services is attached.

Jan 2025

Our offices were shut down for two days immediately following the Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday due to inclement weather.



Social media article about building closure:



Washtenaw County Health Department

Intro
Making Washtenaw County #HealthyTogether

Page · Medical & health

Washtenaw County Health Department is responsible for this Page

555 Towner St, Ypsilanti, MI, United States, Michigan

(734) 544-6700

health@washtenaw.org

washtenaw.org/health

Open now

96% recommend (43 Reviews)

Photos [See all photos](#)

Board of Health Meeting
Friday, October 24 from 9 to 11 am

Sleep Tips for


Lead is an invisible threat.
Learn about the sources of lead and how to protect yourself.

If you are in need of mental health services, please contact 988 or contact PES at 734.936.5900. ... See more

1 6 shares

Like Comment Share


Write a comment...

Washtenaw County Health Department January 17 · 

Update as of 1/21: Due to the continued extreme cold weather, Washtenaw County will close non-essential offices and services on Wednesday, 1/22 - this includes the Health Department.

Though our offices will be closed, 555 Towner in Ypsilanti will be available as a warming center from 8:30am-5pm on Wednesday for anyone who needs a place to warm up.

Regular Health Department hours will resume on Thursday, 1/23.

Hours update 

Monday, January 20: Washtenaw County is closed in observation of Martin Luther King Jr. Day. 555 Towner in Ypsilanti will not be open as a warming center on Monday.

Tuesday, January 21: The County will close non-essential offices and services due to expected extreme cold weather conditions - this includes the Health Department. Though our offices will be closed, 555 Towner in Ypsilanti will be available as a warming center from 8:30am-5pm on Tuesday for anyone who needs a place to warm up.

Stay warm and stay safe, everyone! See cold weather safety information and more details about local warming sites: <https://www.washtenaw.org/1799/Cold-Weather>

Washtenaw County Health
Department offices will be

CLOSED

Tues, Jan 21

due to winter weather

County offices are also closed Mon, Jan 20 for MLK Day.



Washtenaw County
Health Department
healthy together



Unplanned Office Closures Due to Inclement Weather – *Response Summary*

- **Internal Notification:** Closure information was received via email and calls through the fan-out sheet.
- **Client Appointments & Benefits:** The WIC Supervisor and WIC Service Coordinator coordinated follow-up for scheduled clients, including issuing benefits, rescheduling appointments, and sending on-demand notifications for recertifications, evaluations, NCRD, BFPC, and EDU appointments. They also contacted CERTs/PCERTs to reschedule appointments for the next available day.
- **On-Site Signage:** The building site committee posted clear signage at the office to inform walk-in clients of the closure.
- **Public Communications:** The Communications Team shared updates on social media and added a temporary phone greeting to inform callers of the closure and provide information on emergency food resources.



Tips for Local WIC Agencies to Strengthen Emergency Preparedness

- 1. Participate with your building Safety Committees:** Be an active member of your building's site and safety committee to stay informed and involved in emergency planning and response.
- 2. Engage in Emergency Preparedness Efforts:** Join your organization's emergency preparedness team to ensure WIC program needs are represented during planning and decision-making.
- 3. Keep Contact Information Current:** Regularly update and verify your phone fan-out sheet to ensure rapid and reliable communication during emergencies.
- 4. Coordinate with Communications Teams:** Maintain a strong working relationship with your department's communications team to streamline public messaging and client notifications.
- 5. Plan for Service Continuity:** Develop a clear plan to minimize disruptions to client services during emergencies, including benefit issuance, appointment rescheduling, and alternative communication methods.



Washtenaw County Health
Department offices will be

CLOSED

Tues, Jan 21

due to winter weather

County offices are also closed Mon, Jan 20 for MLK Day.



Phone
issues
at 555
Towner



Washtenaw County Health
Department offices will be

CLOSED

Mon, Nov 11

in observance of Veterans Day.
We will reopen Tues, Nov 12.



Emergency preparedness communications to the public are
standardized on social media for *ease of comprehension* —

unexpected emergencies appear with a red background, while planned
closures use a blue background.

Example of Social Media Release

Making Washtenaw County #HealthyTogether

Page · Medical & health

Washtenaw County Health Department is responsible for this Page

555 Towner St, Ypsilanti, MI, United States, Michigan

(734) 544-6700

health@washtenaw.org

washtenaw.org/health

Open now

96% recommend (43 Reviews)

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Washtenaw County Health Department
January 29 · 🌐

WIC IS OPEN

WIC ESTÁ ABIERTO

Washtenaw County WIC Chest/Breastfeeding Support
January 29 · 🌐

We are here!! I'm in the office! Come see me.

We know there's been some confusing news recently, but we want to reassure you: WIC benefits are still available, and WIC offices remain open.

Please continue using your benefits, going to your appointments, and accessing services as usual. Your health and well-being are our top priority. We'll keep you updated as we learn more. ❤️

#WIC #HealthyStartsHere

Example of Social Media Release



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health@washtenaw.org
washtenaw.org/health
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Washtenaw County Health Department
October 6 at 2:16 PM · 🌐

There's a federal government shutdown, but WIC is still open. Michigan WIC clinics continue to provide food benefits, nutrition education, breastfeeding support, and referral services. Learn more about WIC on our website (washtenaw.org/wic) or call 734-544-6800.

wic MICHIGAN

OPEN FOR BUSINESS

during the federal government shutdown.

Photos See all photos

- Board of Health Meeting
- Sleep Tips for Sleep-Deprived Parents
- Lead is an invisible threat.
- JOIN WFPC
- NARCAN TRAINING
- 1st Annual MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS FAIR

Example of Social Media Release

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washtenaw.org/health

Open now

96% recommend (43 Reviews)

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Washtenaw County Health Department
October 9 at 2:03 PM

From 10pm on Friday, October 17 through Sunday, October 19, the WIC system will be down for a planned system update. You will not be able to make WIC purchases during this time. WIC will be updating whole grains, cheese, and formula benefits.

With this update, if your family receives whole grains or cheese benefits, you will see the unit is now in ounces (OZ). The amount, allowed sizes, and brands of whole grains and cheese you can buy will remain the same.

All clients will receive a text or phone notification when the system is back up and WIC benefits can be used at the store. Check www.Michigan.gov/wic for more information.

THE WIC SYSTEM WILL BE DOWN STARTING AT 10PM ON FRIDAY, OCTOBER 17 THRU SUNDAY, OCTOBER 19.

NO WIC PURCHASES CAN BE MADE DURING THIS TIME.

5 likes, 27 shares

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Write a comment...

