

## Low Head Circumference

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### Definition/ cut-off value

Less than 5<sup>th</sup> percentile head circumference based on National Center for Health Statistics/Centers for Disease Control and Prevention age/sex specific growth charts (2000).

**Note:** For premature infants up to 1 year of age, assignment of this risk criterion will be based on adjusted gestational age. For information about adjusting for gestational age see: “Guidelines for Growth Charts and Gestational Age Adjustment for Low Birth Weight and Very Low Birth Weight Infants” (FNS Policy Memorandum 98-9, Revision 7, April 2004).

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### Participant category and priority level

#### Category

#### Priority

Infants

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### Justification

Low head circumference (LHC) is related to a variety of genetic, nutrition, and health factors. Head size is also related to socioeconomic status, and the relationship is mediated in part by nutrition factors. Abnormal LHC is indicative of future nutrition and health risk, particularly poor neurocognitive abilities. LHC is associated with LBW and is a strong predictor of growth retardation and other dimensions of growth and development. However, LHC alone does not necessarily indicate an abnormal head size. The diagnosis of abnormal LHC must also be based on the presence of other evidence and knowledge of the causes of LHC. (1)

Although WIC agencies may choose not to take head circumference measurements, referral data that indicates LHC may be used to assign this risk. LHC, whether determined by referral data or head circumference measurement, necessitates the appropriate referral and follow-up by WIC staff.

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### References

1. Institute of Medicine. WIC nutrition risk criteria a scientific assessment. Washington (DC): National Academy Press; 1996. p.114.
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