



# NEWS



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CONTACT: Lisa Slater  
(309) 888-5489 (office)  
(309) 838-1599 (cell)

## **New Year Brings New Look to Online Food Establishment Inspection Reports**

*Users to gain more information to assist in making educated choices about where to eat*

BLOOMINGTON – A recent move to a new electronic food establishment inspection reporting process will make it even easier for diners in McLean County to choose where to have their next meal. Effective January 8th, a more detailed online inspection report database debuts on the McLean County Health Department website, <http://health.mcleancountyil.gov>.

The new database gives users a better understanding of why a restaurant received the score it was given during an inspection. With the new reports, viewers will see what, if any, observations were noted during the inspection. Additionally, as the features of the new system are used more fully during inspections, the online reports will also include public health rationales explaining why noted observations are violations.

Health department sanitarians inspect food establishments between one and four times each year, depending on their level of risk. Full-service restaurants, for example, are inspected more frequently than convenient stores or school cafeterias. Inspectors also return to food establishments as warranted for re-inspections or to follow-up on complaints. Sanitarians follow the Illinois Food Safety Code which regulates food temperatures, hand washing, equipment cleanliness, food handling, storage, plumbing, and physical structures. The most serious types of violations involve issues related to personal hygiene, food handling, food temperature controls, the potential for cross contamination, and sewer back up. If an observed violation poses an imminent threat to public health, the establishment owner is asked to discontinue operation until the violation has been corrected.

Tom Anderson, director of the Environmental Health Division, sees many positives with the new online inspection reports database, but cautions users to look at more than one inspection report to determine whether a violation is an isolated incident or part of a trend. As Anderson explains, “An inspection captures a snapshot of a food establishment’s day-to-day food handling practices. Any establishment can have an off-day.”

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The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that each year roughly 1 in 6 Americans (or 48 million people) get sick, 128,000 are hospitalized, and 3,000 die of foodborne diseases. According to the CDC and the National Center for Environmental Health, Division of Emergency and Environmental Health Services, a 2010 survey by the National Association of County and City Health Officials found that 78% of local health departments conduct restaurant inspections.

Sanitarians from the Environmental Health division at the McLean County Health Department help protect residents by minimizing the risk of foodborne illnesses through:

- issuing permits and inspecting restaurants and other retail food establishments,
- educating kitchen managers on how to improve their practices to prevent foodborne illness; and
- investigating outbreaks to identify their environmental causes.

The McLean County Health Department is dedicated to the prevention and control of disease through health promotion, early intervention and health protection within our county. Follow us on Twitter (@McLeanHealth) and "Like" us on Facebook (Facebook.com/McLeanHealth), for information about public health affecting you.

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