

https://www.messenger-inquirer.com/news/health-inspectors-critical-to-community-health/article_6a68fb04-b5f1-5d9f-b8f3-ea28c68fc7d0.html

Health inspectors critical to community health

By Christie Netherton Messenger-Inquirer
Jan 23, 2022



Ryan Christian, environmental health program manager, stands in his office on Friday at the Daviess County Community Health Center.

Photo by Alan Warren, Messenger-Inquirer |
awarren@messenger-inquirer.com

Ryan Christian, environmental health program manager for the Green River District Health Department, wears many hats as a health inspector.

In the public health field, he said, every day is different.

Inspectors look at establishments all across the board, according to Christian. This might include restaurants and other food establishments, schools, retail establishments, tattoo and piercing parlors, or even on-site sewage evaluations for septic systems or septic tank installation inspections.

“It’s a long list,” he said.

Inspections on restaurants and other establishments that sell food items, Christian said, are performed at least twice a year, possibly more depending on the establishment's history.

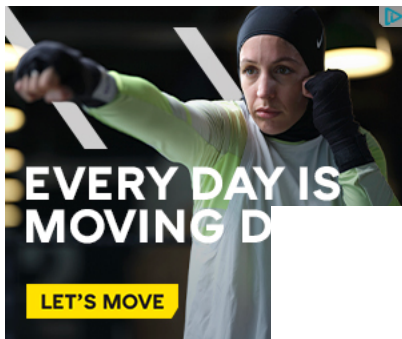
With colder weather arriving, he said the community can begin to expect more restaurant health inspections, as inspectors begin focusing more of their efforts indoors.

Christian said each inspector — there are four in Daviess County, including himself — performs around 15-30 inspections per week, depending on what is on the books, as some establishments might take longer than others.

“You can do a whole lot in one day, and then you might show up somewhere that has a lot going on in a restaurant and spend half your day there, so it just kind of depends,” he said. “It’s always something changing, something different.”

A restaurant inspection, he said, might take longer because there are a lot of different things to look at.

When a health inspector enters a restaurant, he said, they check temperatures in coolers and freezers, on warmers, as well as different food items, such as chicken and pork to ensure everything is cooked to the proper temperature.



Other aspects of restaurants will also be inspected, such as bathrooms and dining rooms. Employees are also checked for proper hand-washing and glove wearing and to ensure knowledge of food safety standards.

It can be a long process, especially if there are several violations in one place, as inspectors will look through an establishment without prior notice.

Establishments are then graded on a 100-point grading scale, and any establishments that have one critical health violation will receive a failing grade and a follow-up within one to 10 days, depending on the nature of the violation.

Improperly stored chemicals, for example, would be something an establishment would be able to adjust likely within a day's time. An infestation of some sort, however, might take up to 10 days to resolve.

More than 90% of establishments pass a health inspection on the first try, according to Christian.

A grade is important, he said, as it is displayed at the front of the establishment and is something people look at as soon as they walk in the door, making obtaining a good grade all the more desirable.

“As far as leeway, there are teaching moments, but if it is of a critical nature, we enforce that to make sure that people do understand what they need to correct for public safety,” he said. “The majority of establishments pass their inspections, and what has really helped that is the letter grade, because people do not want to post a C, and they don't want to post a B, they want that A up there, so it's a high percentage of places that pass.”


Christian said there has also been a lot of effort since COVID to work with restaurants and other establishments to encourage best hand-washing practices, mask wearing and to work with employees who might be sick to keep them home until they are cleared to come back.

One thing inspectors do look out for, as well, he said, are whether there are sick employees at work.

While there are situations where restaurants or other food establishments may have to close, those instances, Christian said, are few and far between.

“It has to be an imminent health hazard — so something that could cause harm to the public in an immediate way, so if a restaurant, say, had a roach infestation, or if sewage were backing up in the restaurant or the bathrooms were unable to be used, then a facility would have to be closed until those were addressed,” he said. “It doesn't happen often, by any means, but there have been a few times throughout my career.”

In order to reopen, he said the problem must be completely resolved and there must be a plan in place to prevent it from recurring.

 Christian has been in his position with GRDHD for about 14 years, having graduated from Western Kentucky University with a bachelor's degree in occupational safety and health with a focus in public health.


He said his job fell in his lap, and he has enjoyed it since day one.

"I love my job, I really do," he said.

The role of a health inspector, he said, is kind of like the man behind the curtain, because much of what they do goes unseen.

The effects of a health inspector's job, he said, would not truly be seen unless it did not exist, as the purpose is to keep people from getting sick.

Christian said he takes pride in what he does. He takes his job seriously and is passionate about keeping the community safe, knowing his work turns out a positive effect for those around him.

 "I know that what we do is very beneficial," he said. "Even restaurants — owners really enjoy what we do and most people really work hard to do the right thing and keep a safe and clean facility."

 Christie Netherton, cnethert

