



Report a delivery issue

Ratings for Newton eateries improve cleanliness, officials say

E-MAIL

FACEBOOK

TWITTER

GOOGLE

LINKEDIN

7

By **Matt Rocheleau**

GLOBE STAFF NOVEMBER 11, 2015

As Boston health inspectors prepare to hand out grades to rate food safety practices at restaurants, officials in nearby Newton are getting their first taste of a similar program.

Early results suggest that since the start of the new system, the suburb's restaurants are doing a better job meeting standards designed to prevent food-borne illness, Newton officials said.

"We've been really pleased," said Deborah C. Youngblood, Newton's health and human services commissioner.

Newton inspectors rated each restaurant's food safety practices this year using a point system. Depending on the numerical score, restaurants were placed into one of four categories — superior, excellent, fair, or unacceptable.

The results were shared with restaurateurs, but the initial round of scoring was not made public. It was intended just to familiarize owners with the system, Youngblood said.

**SOCIAL SECURITY
SUCKS**

palmbeachgroup.com

Born before 1969? You can get
an extra \$4,098 monthly with this





Boston to assign restaurants letter grades

The system will rate cleanliness and food safety practices, giving diners a visible tool to choose where to eat.

Last month, the city began making the ratings public. The scores are posted in prominent locations inside each establishment — and [online](#) — on a rolling basis, as inspections are completed. Officials hope that all of Newton's roughly 200 restaurants will be rated by the end of January, Youngblood said.

By the end of October, 61 restaurants had received a public score. Only a handful fell outside the superior or excellent categories, Youngblood said.

More than eight of 10 restaurants that received public ratings achieved higher scores than during the pilot period, suggesting restaurants stepped up their games, officials said. Nearly half the restaurants saw score increases that bumped them up to the next-highest category.

Youngblood said she didn't expect such immediate improvement.

TEXAS ROADHOUSE COUPONS

befrugal.com/TexasRoadhouse

Free Coupons for Texas Roadhouse.
Latest Coupons - Print, Eat & Save!



“I had thought they would improve but that it would take a while,” she said.

The program, which Newton officials believe was a first in the state, was developed using grant money from the Food and Drug Administration.

Bob Luz, president and chief executive of the Massachusetts Restaurant Association, said he was not sure yet what to make of the program.

“Newton’s implementation is so new that it is too early to tell how it will work,” Luz wrote in an e-mail. “The results bear watching.”

Still, he commended Newton officials on having a “thorough, inclusive process” that incorporated restaurateurs and residents before the city launched the initiative.

Youngblood said restaurateurs had worried the rating process would become onerous and potentially lead to a drop in sales if they received a poor rating.

“But in other communities that have rolled it out, they have not seen a financial hit to restaurants,” she said. “If anything, they’ve seen an uptick in business because there’s an increased confidence among consumers.”

Still, grading systems elsewhere have faced criticism, including that the programs are arbitrary and unfair. Some specialists are skeptical of assertions the systems lead to improvement.

Youngblood said the new system provides motivation for restaurateurs to follow the rules. She said that in past years, at some locations, inspectors would repeatedly write the same violations. The infractions typically were not serious enough to prompt serious action such as a shutdown, but the lack of cooperation proved concerning.

“There wasn’t quite enough incentive for restaurants to make some of the fixes,” she said. “Now the stakes are high.”

Newton’s system differs in some ways from the program Boston is planning and from other cities’ rating systems.

Youngblood said Newton officials had wanted, and would still prefer, a letter grade-based system and had considered requiring ratings be posted in restaurant storefronts, rather than on interior walls, both features of Boston's plan. But Newton officials made concessions.

"It seemed like relatively harmless concessions," said Youngblood, who took over the Health and Human Services Department after development of the rating system began. "This is something that's going to be on the walls of their establishment, and we respect their opinion. They've put a lot of work into these businesses."

Newton inspects each establishment at least once a year. Certain types of establishments, such as sushi restaurants, are inspected more frequently because they are considered to have a higher risk for food-borne illness.

Youngblood said once inspectors issue a score, the rating stands until the restaurant's next full inspection. But if inspectors find that violations have been corrected during interim visits, the city issues a certificate that the restaurant can hang next to its score placard to note the fixes.

Youngblood said the city is working to inform consumers about what the ratings mean.

"It doesn't have anything to do with the quality of the restaurant, whether the food tastes good, or the quality of the service," she said. "This is a very specific review that has to do with the quality of the kitchen in terms of preventing the risk of food-borne illness."

Matt Rocheleau can be reached at matthew.rocheleau@globe.com.

Get [Today's Headlines](#) from the Globe in your inbox:

[Privacy Policy](#)

SHOW 7 COMMENTS

Top 10 Trending Articles

Most Viewed

Most Commented

Most Shared

How feds gained an inner look at Mass. drug running

Patriots fall to Dolphins, may have to settle for No. 2 seed

Ben Volin: Were the Patriots playing for No. 1 seed or health?

Saudi Arabia cuts ties with Iran

Nick Cafardo: Baseball's big hitters aren't connecting on fre...

Globe reporters, editors mobilize to aid home delivery teams

MY ACCOUNT

10 years later, did the Big Dig deliver?

DOWNLOAD CUSTOMER SERVICE APP

Robert Kraft has Ricki Lander by his side in Miami

Church allowed abuse by priest for years

SOCIAL

FACEBOOK

Boston Sand and Gravel and the northbound train

GOOGLE+

CONTACT

HELP

FAQS

GLOBE NEWSROOM

ADVERTISE

MORE

EPAPER

NEWS IN EDUCATION

ARCHIVES

PRIVACY POLICY

TERMS OF SERVICE

TERMS OF PURCHASE

YOUR AD CHOICES

WORK AT BOSTON GLOBE MEDIA