

Tuesday, Nov. 24, 2020

Mayor's Update

Preliminary COVID-19 Update

There are 1,381 confirmed COVID-19 cases among Newton residents through Monday, Nov. 23, an increase of 79 cases since we last reported figures on Thursday from Nov. 11 - 18. Preliminary case information indicates that the City's increasing COVID-19 incidence rate means that Newton will move into the yellow COVID-19 statewide metric group when the state puts out its updated information later this week.



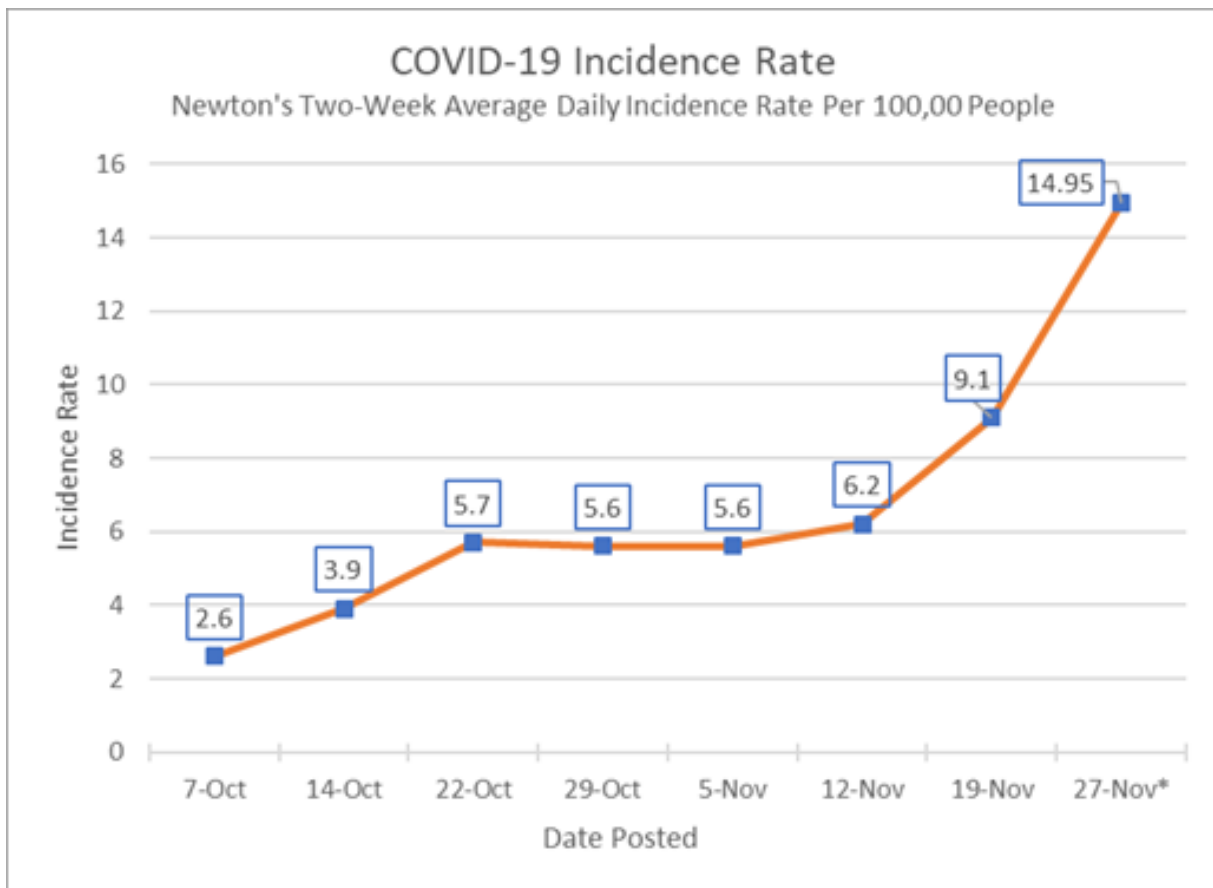
This rise in cases means it's time to reconsider your Thanksgiving plans if they involve gathering indoors with people you don't live with. Unfortunately, the weather forecast is making outdoor gatherings on Thanksgiving likely to be unpleasant due to expected rain. Indoor Thanksgiving gatherings, especially those involving eating and drinking (because you aren't wearing a mask), and sitting together around a table for an extended period of time, increase the risk of spreading COVID-19.

Alternatives may include moving your celebration to the day before or after Thanksgiving when you could gather outdoors with loved ones while still wearing a mask and maintaining at least 6 feet of distance from people outside your own household. (The forecast for Wednesday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday are dry (at least as of 2 p.m. today.) Consider a hike or walk, or a few people visiting outside in the yard, spaced 6 feet apart. As a reminder, indoor gatherings at private residences must not exceed 10 people per the statewide gathering order.

Newton is no exception to the nationwide and statewide rise in COVID-19 cases. Official state data will be released in the [Weekly Public Health Report](#) later this week. Preliminary estimates indicate approximately 192 Newton residents were confirmed to have COVID-19 during the current two-week reporting period (Nov. 8 – 21), increasing the city's average daily incidence rate to approximately 14.95 per 100,000 people, an increase from 9.1 cases per day per 100,000 people. This new incidence rate may further increase before data is finalized tomorrow morning as results continue to come in from people tested toward the end of the reporting period.

An average daily incidence rate of 14.95 cases per 100,000 people means Newton will be in the yellow group of communities larger than 50,000 people with an average daily incidence rate above 10 people per 100,000. [The metrics chart is in this document on page 27.](#)

Newton's 2-Week Average Daily Incidence Rate Per 100,000 people over Time



*11/27 data is an estimate. MDPH will post [actual data here on Friday, Nov. 27](#).

Our new placement in the yellow group is an indication that the risk of COVID-19 is higher in Newton than when data placed us in the green group. The change in group does not indicate changes in [business reopening](#) or [school learning mode](#) are warranted at this time but our behavior does need to change immediately.

I had a chance to hear Dr. David Roberts, a cardiologist and President of the North Shore Medical Center which is part of Mass General Brigham, speak on Sunday about our health care system in Massachusetts. He is deeply concerned that the individual actions by people over Thanksgiving will lead to a collective and dramatic adverse impact on our hospital system. (Hospitalizations are already up, prior to the holiday.) Our individual choices will create so many patients in our hospitals that our health care workers will have to shift to “crisis standards of care.” When there are more patients than resources, health care workers have to make devastating decisions about whom to prioritize. He urged all of us to take personal responsibility so Thanksgiving does not become a super spreader holiday.

We’ll update the [Newton COVID-19 data page](#) this week on Friday instead of Thursday this week due to the Thanksgiving holiday.

FYI: Boston College is also seeing an increase in students testing positive for COVID-19. For the week ending 11/22, their [data dashboard](#) indicates 63 people in the BC community tested positive, as compared to 25 people the week prior. From Nov. 8 to Nov. 21, 13 percent of Newton’s approximately 192 new cases were among Boston College students living in Newton (on or off campus).



Help Your Neighbors

COVID-19 has dramatically increased food insecurity in our city and we are so grateful for our three food pantries and their volunteers. Each December the City of Newton traditionally worked with businesses and non-profits to collect food donations in several locations for our annual Newton Food Drive, culminating in a food-sorting event on New Year's Eve day at City Hall. While we cannot collect the non-perishables and we

cannot come together, we can still support the three food pantries through online donations:

[Arabic Baptist Food Pantry](#) (choose "Food Pantry Donations" on dropdown menu)
[Centre Street Food Pantry](#)
[Newton Food Pantry](#)

In addition, we are helping to collect grocery store gift cards for the food pantries. Drop one off at the Mayor's Office (2nd floor City Hall) any time during business hours through December or donate a card at the Tuesday, Dec. 8 [Mayor's Dazzling Holiday Drive-Thru](#) between 5:30 – 6:00 pm.

Are you in need of food? Please contact our Department of Health and Human Services at (617) 796-1420 or visit [here](#) for information on food assistance.

Giving Thanks and Honoring Those We've Lost

In 1863 in the midst of the strife of the civil war, President Lincoln asked everyone from every part of the United States to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November as a day of Thanksgiving.

In 2020 in the midst of the loss of so many and so much from the pandemic, I give thanks for so much that is good in the midst of so much hurt.

I've seen kindness every day from the people of Newton over these past nine months. The thoughtful knocks on a neighbor's door, the runs to the market or pharmacy to pick up essentials for those who couldn't get there themselves, the generous donations to help those in need, and the creativity and spirit that brought us "together," singing and dancing and exercising during our most trying days.

As Thursday approaches, the doctors, nurses and healthcare workers who have literally been on the front line of this pandemic are on my mind and in my heart. I think, too, of the grocery store employees, mail carriers, delivery drivers and so many others who stayed on the job as the virus swirled so that we could have the essentials we need.

I feel thankful for the dedication from so many who work for the City of Newton who served all of us. I'm grateful for our Police Officers, our Fire Fighters and our ambulance crews who suited up in PPE to respond to emergencies; our teachers,

staff and administrators in the Newton Public Schools who reinvented education; our election workers who spent hundreds of hours sorting mail-in ballots to allow us to vote safely and to ensure that all our votes were counted.

I will forever be thankful for our Health and Human Services staff and those who work in Human Resources and in departments throughout City Hall who spent day after day, night after night, weekend after weekend, working to make sure we had the protections and services in place to keep us all as safe and as well served as possible during this pandemic.

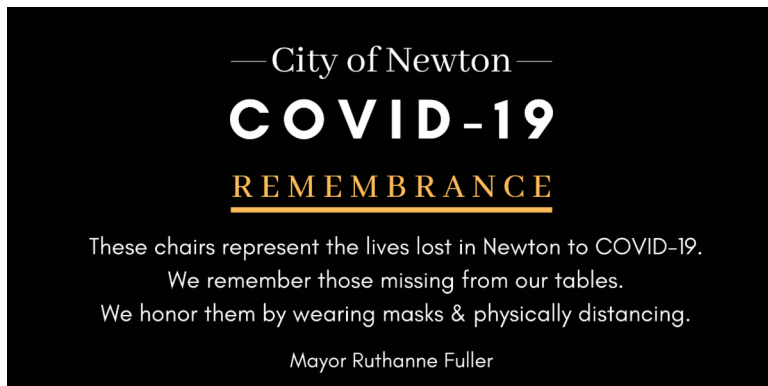
Yet, this is such a bittersweet Thanksgiving.

I see the pain and suffering of so many. I know so many who will be alone with their turkey and mashed potatoes. We have lost so many we loved.

Each week since the first of April, we have reported the deaths of mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, and friends and neighbors who lived in our villages and died with COVID-19. Today, we set out 148 empty chairs on the lawn at City Hall to represent these lives lost, these Newtonians whose chairs will be forever empty at the holiday table. Our memorial is modeled after the 20,000 empty chairs set out in October on the grassy Ellipse in Washington, D.C., and closer to home, the 144 chairs at Lawrence City Hall, and the 82 at Plymouth Town Hall.

As we pass by, we will remember that each empty chair reflects a life lost. Working together, #NewtonTogether, let's honor each of these people by wearing masks, physically distancing, and doing our part, for each other, to keep our neighbors safe.

To quote President Lincoln from the first Thanksgiving proclamation, we give thanks for "the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies ... they should be solemnly, reverently and gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and one voice by the whole



American People ... and ... they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to His tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners or sufferers ...”

Wishing you a warm and special Thanksgiving,

Ruthanne



P.S. Check out newtonma.gov on Tuesday, Dec. 1. Newton's City website is getting a much needed make-over. After 12 years, the website will have a better, more efficient and effective search function, layout, and graphics/colors. Newton's Information Technology Department (with a special shout-out to Joe Mulvey and Greg Ansaldi) has worked with Granicus, a municipal website design company, and staff in all our departments for over a year to make the improvements that will go live on Tuesday.

P.P.S. Here's another way to help our food pantries *and* our artists. The Newton Art Association is partnering with the Centre Street Food Pantry and the Newton Food Pantry to help both organizations. NAA artists will sell their art works with half of the selling price going to the two food pantries. Visit the virtual art exhibition on the [Newton Art Association's website](#) this Friday, Nov. 27.

P.P.P.S. Check out the video of Newton South High School students taking us to England in 1797 for their adaption of Jane Austen's Sense and Sensibility. Their version of the play is set "at a time of plague," with about 40 students and staff using their talent and imagination to produce an amazing performance during these challenging times when actors need to be physically distanced and masked. Bravo.



Mayor Ruthanne Fuller | 1000 Commonwealth Avenue, Newton, MA 02459

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