

## Mayor's Update

### Current Cases

Four hundred and twenty (420) Newton residents have tested positive for COVID-19 through Sunday evening April 19, 2020, our Health and Human Services Department reports. Four hundred and fifteen (415) people had tested positive at the end of the day Saturday, and 407 at the end of the day on Friday.



You are likely noticing, as we are, that the number of new cases reported in Newton has been smaller in the last few days. We will need to see if this continues. While we are always glad to see lower new positive cases, we know this may be an indication of when and how many people are tested rather than a true indicator of a flattening curve. State modeling indicates more cases are expected in Massachusetts and that as testing capabilities expand, more cases will likely be identified.

Our community prevention efforts remain incredibly important. How can you save lives and flatten the curve so our hospitals have the capacity to treat those who are infected? All of us must continue to practice physical distancing, staying at home, avoiding contact with people outside of the household, wearing a face covering whenever physical distancing is not possible, washing hands frequently, and cleaning high-touch surfaces frequently. That's what #NewtonTogether is.



*Some #NewtonTogether signs today in Newton.*



I have heard from some Newton residents and City Councilors suggesting the City close some streets, partially or in full, to vehicles and/or through traffic during the COVID-19 emergency. The goal would be to provide walkers, runners, and bicyclists more space for physical distancing with less exposure to the potential danger of moving vehicles. These are worthy goals.

I have seen a number of cities and towns do some temporary closures- sometimes with some success, other times with some issues. Interestingly, next door in Brookline, their street closure program focuses entirely on streets near concentrations of major essential services and transportation hubs, not on streets to create new recreational venues.

I have explored the idea and looked at possible locations with the Health & Human Services Department, the COVID-19 emergency management team, our Planning-DPW transportation teams as well as our Police.

We have concluded that right now is not the time to close any streets in Newton. We do not want to attract people to certain areas as our goal is to spread people out. We have not found any streets, including the Carriage Way on Commonwealth Avenue, that currently have undue crowding that does not allow physical distancing. Notably, the COVID-19 emergency has drastically reduced vehicular traffic volumes throughout the City so people on foot and on bikes have been sharing the street with cars pretty successfully. (It's not only Newton. The Boston Globe reported on Saturday that traffic across the state is down 80 percent from April last year, including a 74.2 percent dip in two-way traffic at the Allston tolls on the Mass Pike and a 75.9 percent dip in traffic through the Ted Williams tunnel.) I will continue to urge drivers to slow down as the lack of traffic has encouraged some drivers to speed up.

I continue to encourage people to get outside and walk, run and get some exercise with a dog or on a bicycle. This includes visiting Newton's parks, recreational areas and conservation places. (The 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Earth Day is Wednesday; check Green Newton [here](#) for information on virtual activities.) Unfortunately, we had to close the basketball and tennis courts and playground structures as they attracted people from different households to play together and had hand hygiene and physical distancing issues.

Let me also discuss wearing face coverings when outside. We are following the advice of medical experts, the CDC and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. We advise people to wear face coverings when physical distancing is not possible, especially when going to the grocery store or the drug store. If you are outdoors and physical distancing is possible, we are following the medical advice and not requiring people to wear face coverings but encouraging all of us to do so. A number of municipalities in the Commonwealth are requiring people to wear face coverings; however, Attorney General Maura Healey provided written guidance last Friday specifically saying a municipality cannot require people to wear face coverings in public, but may do so on an advisory basis. Medical experts note that the chances of catching the virus outdoors is low if people keep a safe distance from others.

I will have our team continue to monitor the situation on the streets and sidewalks in Newton and I will remain open to revisiting my position as things evolve, with all aspects of public health continuing to be my focus.

## Hate Directed at Any is Hate Directed at All

A Newton South High School AP Chinese online class was invaded last week electronically in awful, racist and hateful incident.

I deplore what those “Zoombombers” did to our students and teacher. As Principal Joel Stembridge wrote in an email (read it [here](#)) to the Newton South community, a hate incident directed to our Newton South Asian community is a hate incident directed to all of us.

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and the Newton Human Rights Commission were notified in addition to the Police. The Newton Police Department urges anyone with information to contact Lt. Bruce Apotheker, our Civil Rights Officer, at 617-796-2103.

Consider joining an online meeting that Families Organizing for Racial Justice (FORJ) planned for tomorrow night, April 21, from 7:30 to 8:30 p.m. to explore ways that COVID-19 is surfacing issues of racism. The meeting will also be a space to explore ways we can support ourselves and others through the uncertainty of this time, according to FORJ. A Zoom password is required to “attend” the meeting. RSVP to receive the password [here](#) or email [forjnewton@gmail.com](mailto:forjnewton@gmail.com).

I meant it when I said **#NewtonTogether**. Together we are confronting an infectious disease. Together we are supporting those who are mourning, those who are ill, those who are under financial distress and those who are anxious and scared. Together with people of all ages, all ethnicities, living in all types of housing, coming from all walks of life – together we will persevere, and we will get through COVID-19. At the same time, together we will push back against racism, hatred and intolerance. Together we will stand for Newton’s core principles of respect, acceptance and diversity.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

P.S. Defending Jacob, the Apple TV series based on the book by Newton author William Landay with scenes filmed in Cold Springs Park and other areas of Newton, comes out on Friday, April 24. All eight episodes will be available to stream (i.e., binge watch!) The story is set in Newton and involves a district attorney whose 14 year old son is charged with murder. The series stars Chris Evans (a.k.a. Captain America) and Michelle Dockery (a.k.a. Lady Mary in Downton Abbey). Watch a trailer [here](#). (Disclaimer: I haven’t seen it so I can’t vouch for the series.)

*More photos from #NewtonTogether*

