

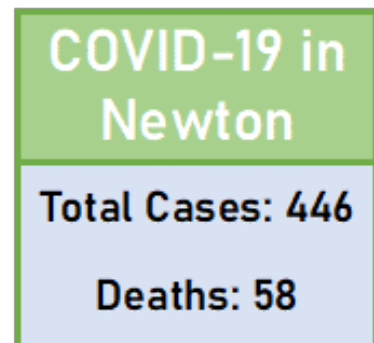
Mayor's Update

Current Cases

The number of Newton residents confirmed to have COVID-19 continues to grow, though we are seeing smaller increases than a week ago. Eight (8) new cases were reported through Tuesday evening, bringing the total number of Newton residents with confirmed COVID-19 to 446 people. Of those cases, 43% are among people living in a Newton long-term care or assisted living facility, which is fairly consistent with the past few weeks. (On Monday, we had 18 additional positives or 438 people in total.)



We had a very difficult week in terms of deaths. With deep sorrow, I have to report that during the past week we were notified of an additional 33 Newton residents who tested positive and have died, bringing this total to 58. (A week ago, we stood at 25 deaths.) We know each and every one of these 58 people have loved ones that are in mourning. Our hearts go out to all of them and may the memories of these 58 Newtonians be as a blessing.



As you might imagine, Newton's Health and Human Services public health nurses make and receive a lot of phone calls with difficult news. One of the bright spots in their long days is when they connect with a resident who meets the State and CDC criteria for discontinuing isolation. (Isolation is defined by the CDC as people who are separated because they have been diagnosed with COVID-19, have symptoms or are waiting for test results.) Approximately 50 percent of Newton's cases to date are no longer in isolation, and the majority of the rest are on the road to recovery. (This percentage doesn't include people in long-term care and assisted living facilities for which we do not have the data.)

We are continuing to collect and analyze Newton-specific information. It is much more difficult to do than you might imagine. In the next few days, we plan to provide more data and more graphic representations of the data.

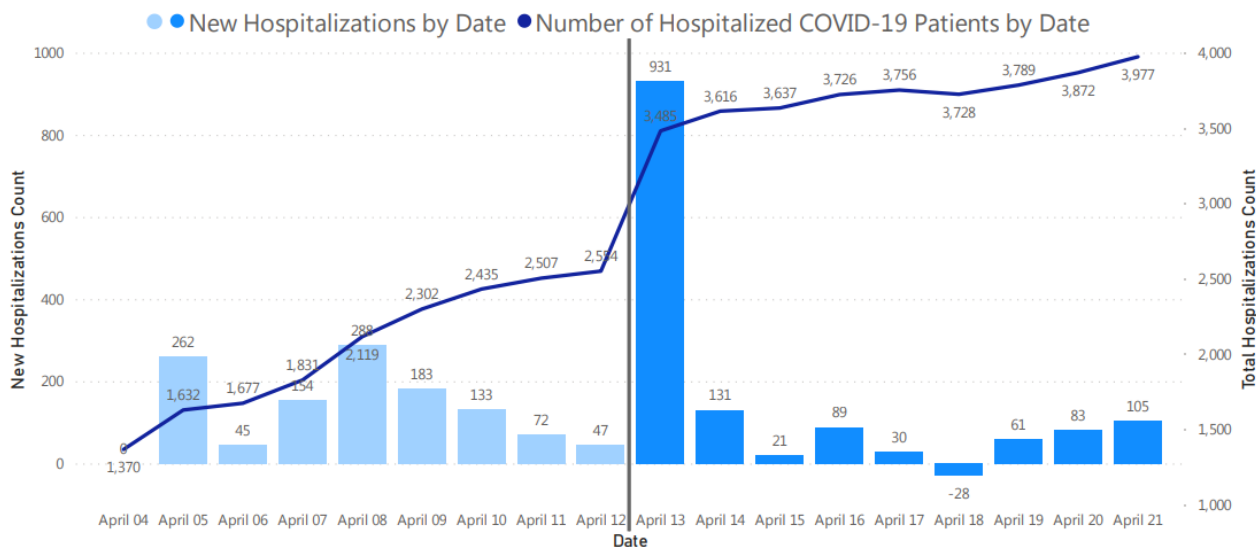
The Massachusetts Department of Public Health has released quite a bit more of statewide COVID-19 data. The full report is available [here](#). It's lengthy, so I'll summarize a few data points of particular interest about hospitalizations.

- Statewide 9% of people who have tested positive for COVID-19 are hospitalized.
- The number of new hospitalizations is up again over the last few days.
- The average age of those requiring hospitalization is 68 years old.
- The total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases reported as hospitalized gets larger as people get older.
- The State also provided another way of looking at data by age which provides

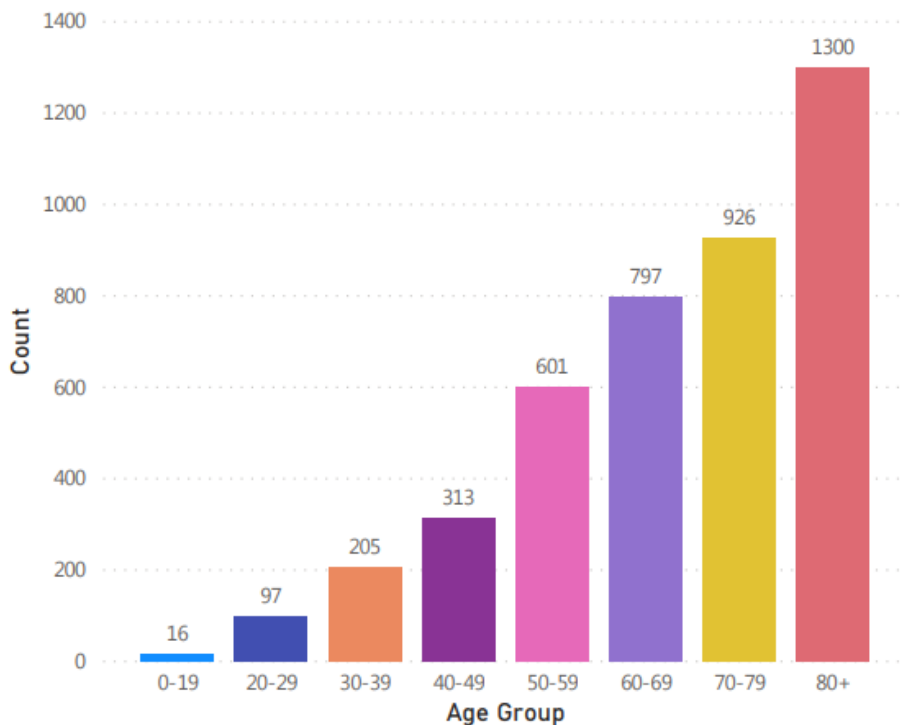
a standardized way to compare the burden of disease. It is the “Rate” or the number of cases per 100,000 people in that age cohort. The rate per 100,000 of confirmed COVID-19 cases reported as hospitalized is highest for those who are 80+ (446) and more than 50% less for those ages 70 to 79 (193). The rate per 100,000 for those in the zero to age 19 group is less than 2. COVID-19 is particularly leading to serious outcomes in older residents.

This data is helpful to us in guiding our prevention and response efforts here in Newton.

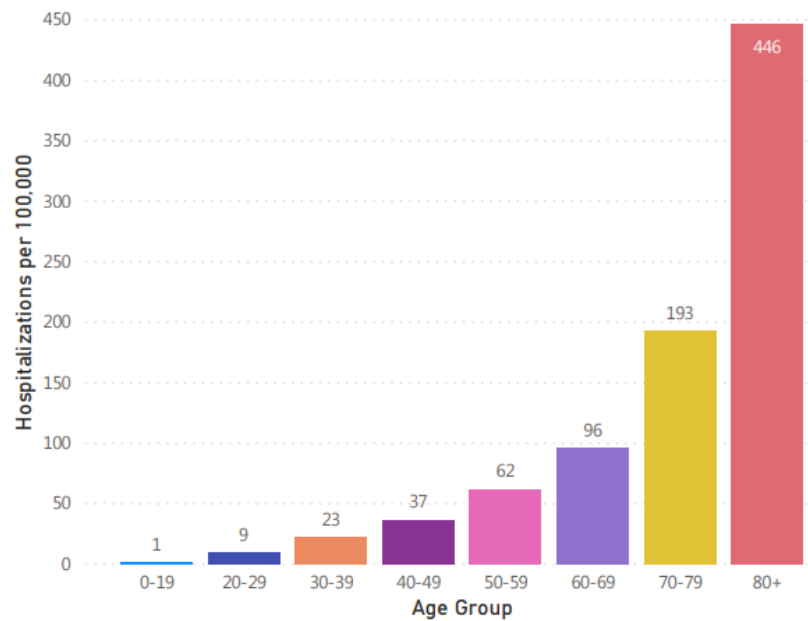
Patients Reported as Hospitalized* with COVID-19 by Date



Confirmed COVID-19 Cases Reported as Hospitalized* by Age Group



Rate (per 100,000) of Confirmed COVID-19 Cases Reported as Hospitalized* by Age Group



Yes, Go to the Hospital

Have you felt unsure or afraid about going to the hospital even when you have worrisome symptoms for a non COVID-19 health issue? Our partners at Newton-Wellesley Hospital are urging us to get the medical help we need.

To quote from them, *“If you need emergency or urgent care unrelated to COVID-19, please seek medical help and avoid waiting until your condition becomes serious. The Emergency Department at Newton-Wellesley Hospital is fully staffed and functional with short wait times.”*

Don’t delay, don’t stay at home and don’t put yourself at risk if you have an emerging medical issue.

Distance Learning Extended

Yesterday Governor Baker announced that students and educators will not be physically together in their classrooms this school year with distance learning continuing until the last day of school in June.

We are still grappling with illness and loss from COVID-19 every day. While testing capacity is increasing, we are a long way from being able to know who may be contagious and whether any of us are immune. Given these realities, I think Governor Charlie Baker made the right decision.

I know that while this is the right thing to do, I also know what hardship this means for our whole community. I recognize that that there is no way that distance learning can replicate what our students used to experience in their school lives. I also know our students in 5th, 8th and especially 12th grades are missing out on so much in the final year of their elementary, middle and high school year. Newton Public Schools is working on how best to address year-end events and gatherings that would usually occur, most notably graduation for our high school seniors.

Newton’s educators have worked incredibly hard and creatively to design an entirely different way of learning and teaching. As Superintendent David Fleishman wrote in

his letter to NPS families yesterday about the novel approaches, “I hope all our student(s) are finding ways to feel connected to their school, supported by their teachers, staff and administration, and engaged in learning experiences through this difficult period.”

I join David Fleishman in expressing my appreciation to each and every one of our students, parents, caregivers and educators as we continue to work to meet the varying needs in our community. I know this is not easy. Both our educators and our students miss going to school and the in-person excellence and equity in education that is Newton’s trademark.

Evictions and Foreclosures Foreclosed

Governor Baker this week signed important legislation to help homeowners and tenants facing foreclosures and evictions. This brings some housing stability to residents who are being financially impacted during the COVID-19 crisis. The law also protects small businesses who are struggling to pay rent while their doors are closed to customers.

The law puts a moratorium on “non-essential” evictions. (“Non-essential” evictions are generally those that do not involve property damage or illegal conduct.) It also means landlords cannot impose late fees for late rent and cannot report late rent to credit agencies if the tenant provides documentation that the late rent payment is due to the financial impact of COVID-19. The law also prevents lenders from foreclosing on property unless it is vacant or abandoned.

These provisions will be in effect for four months (120 days from April 20) or for 45 days after the State of Emergency is lifted by Gov. Baker, whichever comes first.

You can find more information about the new law in the Newton Economic Development Update [here](#).

Unemployment Benefits for Self-Employed and “Gig” Workers

Self-employed people, independent contractors, and “gig” economy workers including freelance writers and consultants, as well as those with a limited work history who don’t qualify for regular unemployment benefits, can now get unemployment assistance.

The new federal Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program provides up to 39 weeks of unemployment benefits to this group of people who are unable to work because of a COVID-19-related reason.

Wondering what the word “gig” means? Wikipedia defines these short-term, independent or temporary employees as, “Gig workers are independent contractors, online platform workers, contract firm workers, on-call workers and temporary workers. Gig workers enter into formal agreements with on-demand companies to provide services to the company’s clients.” Examples include Uber/Lyft drivers, DoorDash delivery people, HourlyNerd consultants, LegalZoom lawyers, and TaskRabbit fix-it people.

You can learn more and apply at mass.gov/pua.

Accessing Food During COVID-19

Many in Newton are struggling to put food on the table right now. If your income has

changed as a result of COVID-19, you may be eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). SNAP is a federal entitlement program and anyone who is eligible will receive benefits.

SNAP benefits are given each month on a plastic card called an EBT (electronic benefits transfer) card which works like a debit card. SNAP benefits can be used to purchase food at grocery and convenience stores and some farmers' markets and co-op food programs. You can give your EBT card to a trusted family member or friend to shop for you.

If you have lost your job or work hours because of COVID-19, you can apply for SNAP right now. SNAP eligibility is based on your current income and liquid assets, not your income from the past year.

Changes to SNAP during the crisis include:

- Everyone eligible will receive the maximum household benefit.
- All applications will be treated as urgent. Applicants will only be interviewed if absolutely necessary to approve their application.

All new SNAP recipients will receive their EBT card by mail and it may take 5 to 10 days to receive it.

One out of 9 people in Massachusetts receive SNAP benefits. Click [here](#) for a 10 second screening to see if you might be eligible.

How to Apply Online: Apply for SNAP benefits today online [DTA Connect](#).

How to Call for Assistance: If you have questions about your eligibility or how to apply for SNAP benefits, [Project Bread](#) has many [resources](#) including a confidential FoodSource Hotline at 1-800-645-8333 where counselors assist callers in 160 languages. It's open Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. You can also reach out to Newton's Health and Human Services Department at 617-796-1420.

Let's Make Sure Every Walker Feels Safe

The weather is getting nicer and we're feeling more housebound so more of us are getting outside for a walk, a run or a bike ride. If you need to be out driving, slow down and share the road. If you're on a bike or out for a jog, make yourself known to walkers and go way around them. Wear a face covering if you can't stay six feet away from others. As one resident wrote today, "I am a 79 year old resident who likes to walk for my exercise. For the past couple of days I see young and old, walkers and runners and people on bicycles with complete disregard for others. I have stopped walking. I no longer feel safe in my city." Let's make sure everyone feels safe walking in Newton.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

P.S. To our Newton neighbors who tomorrow will begin their month-long observance of Ramadan, Ramadan Mubarak.

P.P.S. Has your trash cart been filling up more quickly under the stay-at-home order? Have you noticed how much food has been going to waste now that you're home more? Food waste accounts for 27 percent of the trash stream in Massachusetts, which equates to roughly 4,575 tons of Newton's trash annually.

Let's not let those food scraps go to waste – turn them back into soil to grow more food. You can subscribe for curbside compost pickup with [Black Earth Compost](#). Black Earth Compost, the City-vetted service provider in Newton, is continuing to provide weekly curbside collection of food waste on the same day as your trash and recycling pick-up. The cost is \$59.99 for six months, plus a one-time start-up fee of \$34 to get a 13-gallon lockable bin.

Or, this could be a great opportunity to try composting in your backyard. [Learn more](#) about backyard composting and [purchase](#) your bin to get started.

P.P.P.S. Today is the 50th Anniversary of Earth Day. Coinciding with this milestone, Green Newton has launched a *Take Action!* tool on its website [here](#). Take a look at some suggestions for how we can lower our carbon footprint. (Fifty-nine percent (59%) of greenhouse gases produced in Newton come from households so our personal actions are crucial to becoming carbon neutral.)

SIDEWALK CHALK CLIMATE JOKES

Julia and Mia show how it's done.

