

Mayor's Update

Current Cases

On our updated COVID-19 data page at www.newtonma.gov/covid19data, you will find that there are 516 Newton residents who have tested positive for COVID-19 through the end of the day Thursday, April 24. We reported a significant increase to 499 positive cases through Wednesday, and 446 through Tuesday.



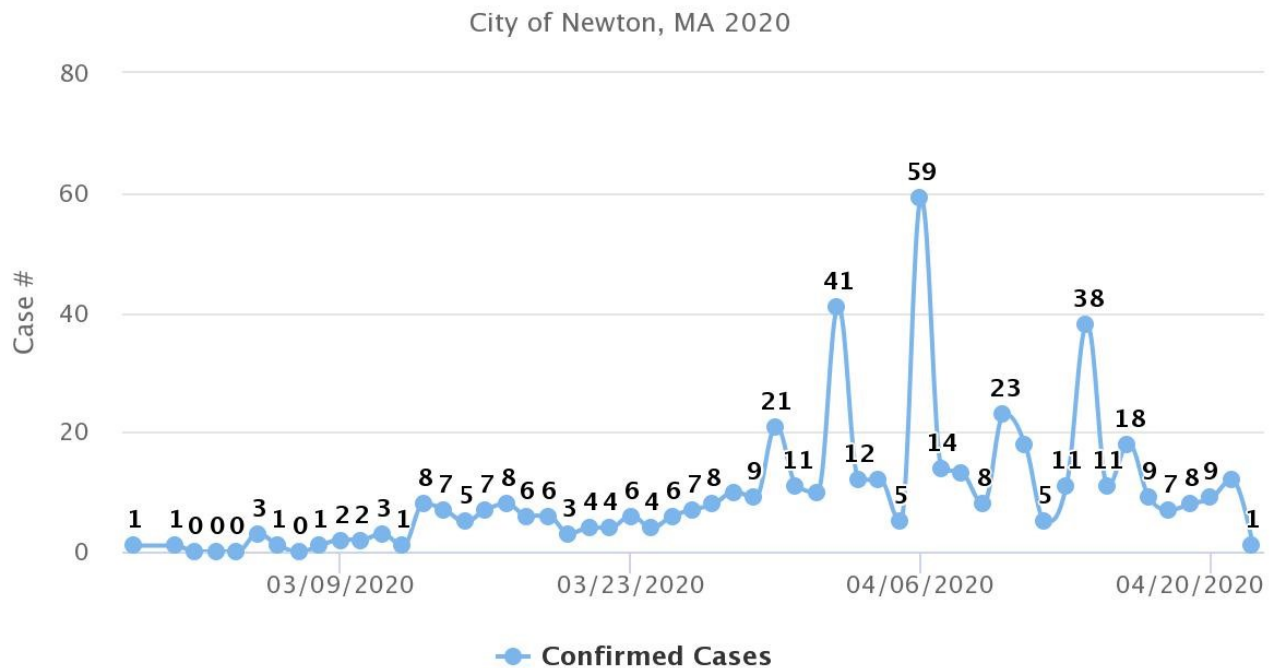
We learned recently that one of the labs doing COVID-19 testing, Quest Diagnostics, temporarily experienced a nationwide delay in transmitting some of their results. We have been told the problem has been corrected. This resulted in a large group of positive test results for Newton residents coming through on Wednesday; these test results were processed earlier but not reported to state or local health departments. This delay is likely why we saw smaller increases in total case counts in the days prior to Wednesday.

COVID-19 in Newton	
Total Cases	516
New Daily Cases	17
*As of 4/23	

Newton's updated COVID-19 data page includes the useful graph below (with data through Wednesday, April 22). It depicts cases by symptom onset date whenever possible and defaults to the date of test administration when that's not possible. This data provides a picture of when people become sick with COVID-19, instead of when our health department is notified of a positive COVID-19 test. The graph isn't updated yet with the larger batch of delayed results that came yesterday but will be next week. (We will update this graph at least weekly.)

The graph is dynamic. It will change if new information is received about a positive case. For example, a person initially counted as a Newton resident may actually live elsewhere (and therefore will be removed), or a test date may have been initially used, and later is changed when a symptom onset date becomes available.

Newton Cases by Symptom Onset Date



Interested in more information explaining the data? The Newton Health and Human Services Department (HHS) uses the data to understand COVID-19 and its impact on Newton as a community and the residents who acquire it. When the HHS Department reports information to the public about communicable diseases, they balance the need to protect confidential information with the usefulness of sharing information that may inform planning and prevention. As the pandemic has evolved and further impacted the residents and businesses of our city, they have more to share and keep developing more ways to communicate it. (Notably, this work involves significant collaboration with our talented Information Technology staff, for which we are grateful.)

We will continue to post the new positive cases and the positive case total each weekday based on information received through the end of the previous day. This is static data. Once reported, we do not change it. The one-day lag adopts similar practices also used by both the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Defining a closing date/time with a slight lag (next day instead of same day) will better allow us to collect, aggregate and report the growing number of cases accurately and efficiently.

If you previously tracked new cases by the date when reported on our website or my emails, that information will look different than the new graph above. This is because the new presentation is symptom onset date instead of notification date.

Where does the data come from? Communicable disease data in Massachusetts comes from a Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH)-run electronic database. COVID-19 is one of many communicable diseases about which healthcare providers and laboratories are required to notify MDPH. This data is then shared with health officials in cities and towns.

Why is the MDPH data on the state database about Newton different than what's posted here? There are a few reasons that the total number of cases and some

information about those cases may differ in local and MDPH reports. One reason is the data reported may have been downloaded from the electronic disease notification system at different times. Another is that as people diagnosed with COVID-19 are contacted by the public health staff, more information about them is learned. This could include that the person lives in a different city or town, and that case is then removed from the Newton total and added to the municipality where they live. All data reported can and does change as more information is collected and updated.

Why aren't we reporting race/ethnicity data? Available statewide race/ethnicity data is reported by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. At this point, Newton-specific data is often not available.

Will we post more data? Yes, we are working on providing periodic updates with additional data points.

Click [here](#) for additional statewide data posted by MDPH on their website.

Tough Decision on Furloughs

With the dramatic impact of the pandemic on the economy, we are continually evaluating our operations and finances. After significant assessment, I made the hard decision that the positions of part-time employees who are no longer working due to COVID-19 closures of City of Newton programs, services or functions will be temporarily furloughed and the employees have been placed on "Standby Status" effective April 20, 2020. (Other part-time employees in positions that continue to have work are not being temporarily furloughed.)

These employees may apply for unemployment compensation through the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Unemployment Assistance (DUA).

This is so difficult as we value our part-time employees as critical members of the City of Newton team. While the future is uncertain, we are hopeful that we will be reopening activities and functions and welcoming these staff back to employment with the City.

Read my letter to the City Council [here](#).

\$2.5M to Help Newtonians Pay their Rent

The economic fall-out and corresponding job loss from the pandemic is hitting Massachusetts households hard, especially those cost-burdened households who pay more than 30% of their income toward monthly housing costs.

The Federal Reserve Bank of Boston estimates 36% of renters in New England are at risk of not being able to make their rent payment because of lost jobs and decreased incomes from the COVID-19 crisis. Given our expensive housing costs, Newton rental households, especially those with low to moderate incomes, may be enduring an especially difficult period now.

Our housing team here in Newton's Planning and Development Department has been working hard and has found a way to help those households hardest hit with rent relief on a short-term basis.

Following guidance from the Massachusetts Housing Partnership and along with the support of several City Councilors and members of the Community Preservation

Committee, we are looking to utilize \$2 million in Community Preservation Act funding (approximately one-sixth of the CPC's \$12 million unbudgeted resource funding) and \$500,000 in federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to establish an emergency rental housing program. It will assist income-eligible Newton households impacted financially by COVID-19 by providing a portion of their monthly rent for up to a three-month period.

A presentation of the Emergency Housing Relief package is scheduled for a special joint meeting of the Community Preservation Committee and the Planning and Development Board on Monday, May 4 at 7:00 p.m.

I will let you know when the application form is available.

Fair Housing

President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act on April 11, 1968. Known today as the Fair Housing Act, the law prohibits discrimination concerning the sale, rental, or financing of a house or apartment based on race, religion, national origin, sex, disability or family status. Not to be overlooked in the midst of this health and financial crisis, April is National Fair Housing Month.

As it happens, our Planning Department is deep in the process of identifying the obstacles that persist to fair housing in Newton and our region. As the lead entity for the thirteen-community WestMetro HOME Consortium, Newton is developing an "Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice," a five-year plan that analyzes barriers in access to housing opportunities throughout the thirteen communities and identifies priorities to address and steps to address these issues. On Monday, May 4th at the Planning and Development Board meeting, the City's fair housing consultant will present the plan's initial findings. A public hearing will be held that evening to solicit feedback and ensure that the City and the Consortium are effectively taking steps to affirmatively further fair housing. Find more information on the plan [here](#).

Lots of thanks go to the members of the Newton Fair Housing Committee and the folks who comprise the organization known as Engine 6. Members of these two organizations keep fair housing issues and the obstacles to making Newton a welcoming community for all front and center.

Business Survey

We're not there yet, but one day our stores, restaurants, hotels, fitness companies and businesses will be open. I have asked the Newton Economic Development Commission (EDC) to think about a recovery plan focusing particularly on steps that can be taken in Newton to assist our businesses regain their footing post COVID-19. As part of the EDC development of these ideas, they are surveying Newton businesses.

Do you operate a business here in Newton? What challenges will you face as you reopen? How can the City help? Take the Survey [here](#). It will be open through Monday, May 4. Questions? Email Newton Economic Development Director Devra Bailin at dbailin@newtonma.gov.

Homemade Face Covering

Remember to wear a face

covering in any situation where you can't physically distance.

Want to easily make your own? Click the photo and watch United States Surgeon General Jerome Adams explain how it's done.



Warmly,

Ruthanne

P.S. In the midst of this difficult time, I want to share some happy news. Join me in congratulating Newton Firefighter Paul Bobos and Romy Cohen Bobos, high school sweethearts, who got married at City Hall last Thursday morning. Paul said, as a first responder during this crisis, they felt the time was right to finally get married. My source tells me they sure looked happy.

P.P.S. Check out Newton Community Farm's online Seedling Sale. Order and pay through their online store starting Monday, April 27 through Wednesday, May 13, then schedule your curbside pickup date and time. More than 80 varieties of veggie, fruit, herb, and flower seedlings are available, plus soil. Find more information [here](#).

P.P.P.S. Today I join our Armenian neighbors in commemorating and remembering the 105th Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide.

(Photo, by Newton photographer Peter Vanderwarker, is of the Armenian Heritage Park at the Rose Kennedy Greenway designed by Newton resident Donald Tellalian.)

