

Mayor's Update

Current Cases and Losses

The cumulative total of COVID-19 cases among Newton residents increased to 675 people, according to preliminary data through Tuesday, May 12. This is an increase of 10 people since Monday, May 11 when we stood at 665. Of the 675 positive cases, approximately 46 percent are residents of Newton nursing homes and assisted living facilities.



The percentage of people “post-isolation,” meaning they have met the criteria to discontinue isolation after a COVID-19 diagnosis and are considered recovered, continues to increase. Fortunately, 73 percent of people in Newton diagnosed with COVID-19 (outside nursing homes and assisted living facilities) are post-isolation. Last week (May 6), this percentage was 71 percent, and the week before (April 29), it was 56 percent.

The symptom onset graph is updated and shows Newton’s 675 cases by symptom onset date or by test date if symptom onset date is unavailable. Not only has the curve flattened, it has gone down.

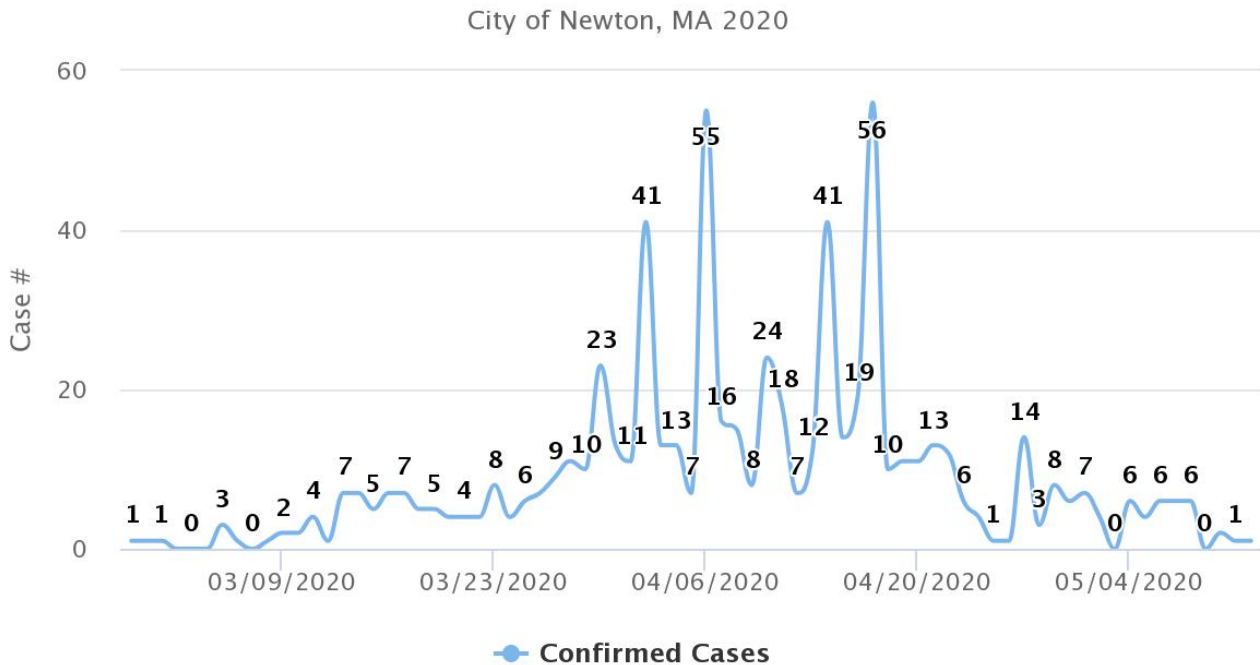
COVID-19 in Newton

Total Cases
675

Total Deaths
96

*As of 5/12

Newton Cases by Symptom Onset Date



Graph data through 5/12/2020

Each week on Wednesdays, I report with a heavy heart the number of residents we have learned of during the last week who had a COVID positive diagnosis and died. There are now 96 people who have died, an increase of 10 people since a week ago, May 6.

It feels inadequate each week as I continue to offer condolences to the families of those we have lost. But, we must acknowledge these losses within our community and beyond and continue to recognize the significance of this tragic pandemic and try our best to comfort those who are grieving.

Answer the Call...

Starting last week, Newton Health and Human Services (HHS) joined many Massachusetts local health departments who are participating in the statewide [COVID-19 Community Tracing Collaborative](#) (CTC) in association with the

nonprofit [Partners in Health](#) and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH). This public health partnership builds contact tracing capacity to help Newton HHS support residents and businesses as we work toward reopening and establishing a new normal.



Routine contact tracing cases are being handled by the COVID-19 CTC, allowing Newton's staff to focus on the more complicated investigations and other elements of Newton's pandemic response. While our HHS staff (including the school nurses) have kept up with case investigations and contact tracing since the first COVID-19 cases were confirmed, we know case and contact tracing will be important and time consuming during the reopening phases and for the long-term. We're grateful for the collaboration with the CTC.

Newtonians can support public health reopening efforts by answering the call (if they get one) and returning health-related phone messages, either from Newton HHS or the MA COVID-19 CTC team. (Please know the phone calls from the CTC team will come from area codes 833 or 857.) Answering the call is incredibly important for your own health, for the health of your close contacts that should also be tested, and for the community at large.

Wondering If You Should Be Tested?

If you think you may have COVID-19 symptoms, first call your health care provider. If your clinician thinks you should be tested but they are unable to offer a test at their own health care facility, they will provide a referral and you can be tested at a test site near you. If you don't have a primary health care provider, many urgent care centers are offering assessment and testing. These are not walk-in sites; an appointment is necessary.

View the current list of testing sites [here](#).

Housing Relief for Our Most Vulnerable Residents

Today the City of Newton is launching our COVID-19 Emergency Housing Relief Program to assist those Newton households who are facing a loss of income due to COVID-19 and are now struggling to pay housing costs.

The \$500,000 program is using federal Community Development Block Grant Coronavirus (CDBG-CV) funds to provide temporary assistance for housing costs. The funding assistance will cover 70% of an eligible household's monthly rent for up to three months. The assistance has a monthly cap of \$2,500 per household, or \$7,500 per household, for three months.

Newton renters who are experiencing a reduced income as a direct result of COVID-19 and earn 80% or less of the Area Median Income (AMI) at the time their application is submitted are encouraged to apply. (For example, a family of four at the 80% AMI level has an annual income of \$96,250.) Households currently receiving rental assistance (e.g. Public Housing tenants, RAFT, Section 8, MRVP or other locally administered support) are also eligible for this program.

A special category of Newton homeowners, those with deed-restricted properties, are also eligible to apply provided they meet the same eligibility criteria as renters. (The deed restriction must be recorded with the Registry of Deeds.)

This COVID-19 Emergency Housing Relief Program purposefully is limited, temporary, and reserved to households at or below 80% of the AMI. This allows us to provide meaningful financial assistance responsibly to Newton's most vulnerable residents during this crisis.

We have partnered with the Metro West Collaborative Development to administer the program on behalf of the City. Metro West is a non-profit community development corporation based in Newton with a long, successful track record.

Interested? Contact Metro West at robyn@metrowestcd.org (preferred method) or 617-923-3505 x5 to begin the application process. The application deadline is Wednesday, June 3, 2020 and the lottery will be held June 10, 2020. (We expect there may be more demand than funding. The City Council is currently reviewing an additional \$2 million in funding from Newton's Community Preservation Act that may be added to the Program.) The details of this program, including program guidelines, can also be found at newtonma.gov/housingrelief.

Help for Our Small Businesses

I am so glad to announce the Newton COVID-19 Small Business Recovery Grant Program to provide a boost toward recovery for our small businesses. Our local small companies have felt so deeply the financial impact of the loss of business during this health crisis.

Funded from the City's federal emergency allocation of Community Development Block Grant Coronavirus (CDBG-CV) funds, the \$300,000 Program will aid in the stabilization of existing small brick and mortar businesses within the City that have had significant business disruption due to COVID-19. Program funds will provide businesses with assistance for commercial rent or mortgage, wages, loss of inventory, and other demonstrated costs.

This program focuses on assisting the smallest merchants in Newton. Grant awards will range from \$10,000 for microenterprises (5 employees or fewer, including the owner) and \$15,000 for businesses with six to twenty employees. (Franchisees of

national or regional chain businesses will not be eligible to receive funding through the program.)

Interested? Small business recovery applications will be accepted until May 27, 2020 and can be found at newtonma.gov/sbr or by emailing sbr@newtonma.gov.

Needham Street Improvements Beginning This Summer

Great news— MassDOT’s Board of Directors just approved the \$31.1 million contract and work on Needham Street to improve the road to better serve the needs of motorists, cyclists, public transit users and pedestrians. Construction will begin this summer. It includes:

- Creating exclusive turn lanes, installing all new traffic signal equipment, adding lanes west of interchanges, and realigning the intersection at Needham and Charlemont Streets.
- Adding 5-foot wide raised bike lanes and shared use paths.
- Adding bus stops.
- Adding continuous sidewalks and designated crosswalks.
- Improving storm water infrastructure.

The project also includes improvements to the existing bridge on Needham Street over the Charles River. The bridge, constructed in 1875, is on the National Register of Historic Places and is structurally sound. Work will maintain the current bridge substructure while rebuilding the top of the bridge to allow three lanes of traffic, a new shared-use path and ornamental railings.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

P.S. Want to contribute to COVID-19 relief efforts? Newton’s Rotary Club has organized a *Newton Front Door Project*; a professional photographer will swing by to take photos of you during this stay-at-home period in front of your home. In return, you make a donation to the Newton Rotary Foundation which will pass 100% of your donation along to one of six non-profits (your choice which one). Support veterans, children, domestic abuse survivors, art or food pantries. Get more info [here](#).

P.P.S. Join me at a [virtual candlelight vigil](#) tonight at 8:00 p.m. as part of National Police Week to honor women and men in blue who have lost their lives in the line of duty. This year 307 police officers will be remembered. Thank you, thank you to our Newton Police officers today, and every day.

P.P.P.S Newton Neighbors Helping Neighbors (in collaboration with a number of partners including the Newton Housing Authority) is providing “boredom buster” care packages for Newton’s older residents and children ages 5 and under while supporting local small businesses. Five Newton retailers— Greentail Table, The Paper Mouse, Hipstitch, Newtonville Books and Henry Bear’s Park— have created \$25 and \$50 “entertainment” care packages including books, puzzles, games, art activities or craft projects for delivery. Click [here](#) to learn more or make a donation.

