

Mayor's Update



COVID-19 Update and Losses

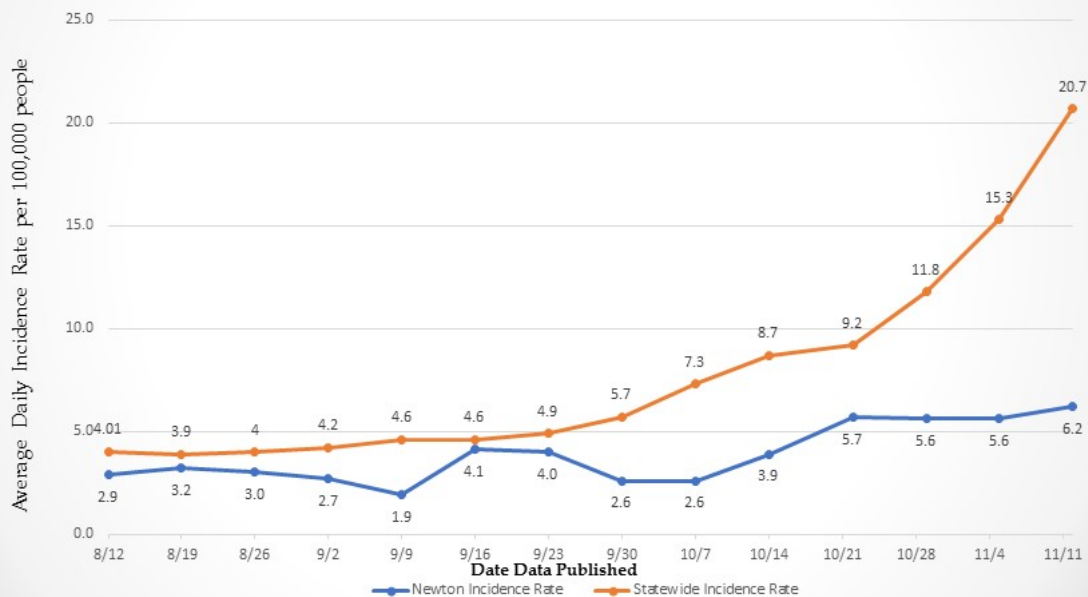
Newton has had 50 additional confirmed positive cases of COVID-19 reported over the six days from Thursday, Nov. 5 through Wednesday, Nov. 11, bringing the cumulative confirmed case total in the City to 1,207 people. During the previous eight day period (Oct. 28 - Nov. 5), we had 44 confirmed cases, and 39 during the eight days prior to that.

The state shows 80 confirmed Newton cases during the most recent two-week reporting period from Oct. 25 - Nov. 7, an increase of eight people from the previous reporting period.

Newton's average daily incidence rate has increased to 6.2 COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people (last week it was 5.6 cases per 100,000 people when there were 72 people during the state's two-week reporting period). Newton's incidence rate has roughly doubled since the state started tracking the incidence rate by community in August. For three weeks, the data indicated a leveling off at around 5.6 cases per 100,000, but the rate increased again during the most recent reporting period, as shown in the line graph below.

Incidence Rate*

Average Daily Incidence Rate per 100,000 people August 12 – November 12



*Dates are when data was published in the MDPH Weekly Public Health Report at

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-response-reporting# covid-19-weekly-public-health-report>

COVID-19 in Newton

Total Cases
1,207

Total Deaths
145

*As of 11/11

Newton's positivity rate for the current reporting period is 0.37%, meaning less than 1 percent of the Newton residents who were tested for COVID-19 in the past two weeks tested positive. Newton's positivity rate was just above 1 percent in mid-August and has remained below 1 percent since then. The state's current positivity rate is 2.29 percent.


Newton is still "green," which is the designation for communities where the average number of new cases per day is less than 10 per 100,000 people.

Updated City & Town Metrics and accompanying guidance were [released last week](#) by the state. The update now accounts for a city or town's population and incorporates both cases during a two-week period and the positivity rate (when at higher levels). Four metric groups are still being used: grey for the fewest cases, followed by green, yellow and red for the highest cases/positivity rate.

CITY & TOWN METRICS

Population			
Group	Under 10k	10k - 50k	Over 50k
Grey	Less than or equal to 10 total cases	Less than or equal to 10 total cases	Less than or equal to 15 total cases
Green	Less than or equal to 15 total cases	<10 avg cases/100k AND >10 total cases	<10 avg cases/100k AND >15 total cases
Yellow	Less than or equal to 25 total cases	≥10 avg cases/100k OR ≥5% pos rate	≥10 avg cases/100k OR ≥4% pos rate
Red	More than 25 total cases	≥10 avg cases/100k AND ≥5% pos rate	≥10 avg cases/100k AND ≥4% pos rate

[Learn more at Mass.gov/StopCOVID19](#)



The state made a number of other changes in the metric system. The terms "low, moderate or high risk" have been dropped, as has the "asterisk" designation for communities with a significant proportion of cases from an institution (colleges, correctional facilities or long-term care). The color-coded map with each community's group designation is no longer being updated by the state and instead there is just a list. To find out the metric group for a community, look for the state's Weekly Public Health Report [here](#).

Four of Newton's neighbors are also designated as green - Brookline, Needham, Wellesley and Weston. Three other neighbors - Boston, Waltham, and Watertown - are yellow.

That's a lot of information about numbers and colors. What does it all mean?

Newton, like many Massachusetts communities, is experiencing an increase in COVID-19 cases. Some communities have more, others not as many. In the green group, we're among approximately 61 communities, or about 17 percent of the state. About 33 percent of communities are yellow, 9 percent red, and 41 percent are grey.

Contact tracing gives us some clues about the virus is spreading. For those situations where the case investigators can determine a source, Newton's case exposures are primarily among people from the same household, from gatherings and among people in institutional settings, such as a college or long-term care/assisted living facility. Fewer exposures, however, are among institutions than in previous weeks, so that tells us there are more cases in the community in general. Sometimes contract tracing is unsuccessful in determining the source of the case exposure. (Regrettably, 50% of the contract tracing overall in Massachusetts fails to determine a source.)

Looking at the data, seeing the rise in cases, and listening to the experts leads to a clear set of actions for each of us. Don't let your guard down. Be careful. Step up to stop the spread. Stay 6 feet away from people you don't live with. Wear a mask inside and outside if you're in public. Clean your hands often. If you're not feeling well, stay home and seek medical advice. At all times, including Thanksgiving, limit your participation in gatherings, keep the numbers small and remain masked and distanced. Protect yourself, your family and our community.

You can find updated information on the Newton [COVID-19 data page](#).

I have to close the update again today feeling morose and thinking the grey skies, drizzle and chill reflect the news. Another three Newtonians have died with COVID-19. Our grim total is now 145 people who have lost their lives with this disease since the first of April. This number represents a world of grief, loss and sadness for those who knew and loved these mothers and fathers, daughters and sons, brothers and sisters, friends and neighbors who lived in our villages and have passed.

Newton Public Schools Data

There were four additional NPS positive cases this week (3 with a test date during the most recent week from Nov. 5 - 11 and 1 in the week prior) for a total of 27 cumulative cases since school began Sept. 14, 2020. All four are among the in-person/hybrid staff. An updated NPS Data Dashboard is posted on Newton's [COVID-19 Data website](#).

Schools Update

Our students, families, and staff in our schools have had a really difficult nine months. We know students learn best in the classroom with their peers. Yet, in the midst of this pandemic, for the health and safety of all, NPS had to pivot to distance learning for our teaching and learning model. Initially, Newton Public Schools were closed entirely to in-person learning on the second Thursday of March through the end of the 2019-2020 school year.

For the current school year, elementary students who were able to choose the hybrid model have been back for in-person classes two mornings a week since mid-September. Parents really want at least two full days. NPS is still working on staffing to make this possible.

Middle school students who were able to choose the hybrid schedule will begin in-person classes this coming Monday, Nov. 16, also for two mornings a week for each student.

On Monday, the School Committee will hear a report from the High School Working

Group with alternative models for starting in-person classes at both high schools. Being fully remote has been really tough for those high schoolers who want in-person opportunities.

Teachers have invested so much of their experience, time and energy to make remote learning inviting, interesting and valuable. But it's still been challenging. I have heard from many of you and I empathize with the challenges students, families and staff are experiencing.

To me, it's crucial that all students who want to be in school have the opportunity to be there with the recommended health and safety protocols in place. I am doing everything I can that's under my direct control to make that possible.

Monday's School Committee Zoom meeting begins at 7:00 p.m. and includes the with discussion on the high school in-person learning. Prior to that, starting at 6:00 p.m., the School Committee will meet to elect the leadership for next year. The Zoom meeting link for all School Committee meetings is <https://zoom.us/j/390017072>, the call in number is 1-646-558-8656, and the meeting ID is 390 017 072.

Overnight Winter Parking Ban Lifted Until Jan. 15

With many college students and family members home for the season because of COVID-19, I have worked with Newton Police Interim Chief Howard Mintz and the Department of Public Works (and consulted with President Susan Albright and Vice President Rick Lipof of Newton's City Council) to lift the Overnight Parking Ban until Jan. 15. (The ban prohibiting overnight on-street winter parking was to have taken effect on Dec. 1.)

Please know if we have snow, we may need to have an Emergency Parking Ban for the duration of the storm and the clean up. If so, we'll get the word out.

We'll revisit the situation in early January and determine whether to extend the lifting of the ban even longer. (It normally ends on March 31.)

Sumana Hatwar, Ketki Tipnis, Heena Bhatt and Shanu Mehta designed a beautiful traditional Indian Rangoli display to welcome guests to City Hall marking the celebration of Diwali. The Diwali festival, celebrated tomorrow, derives its name from the row (avali) of clay lamps (deepa) that Indians light outside their homes to symbolize the inner light that protects from spiritual darkness.



Update on Marijuana

The Host Community Agreement (HCA) Advisory Group team recently reviewed applications from three marijuana retailers who have submitted proposals for marijuana retail establishments in Newton. A marijuana retailer must secure a signed HCA before they can apply for a Special Permit from the City Council.

My decision is just the first step of the process. Applicants need the signed HCA and a Special Permit before proceeding through the state licensing process.

- I am signing a provisional HCA with Nuestra at 1185 Chestnut Street in Upper Falls. This is in an area with a mix of uses, including retail, near the village center. Nuestra has a diverse management team with experience in the cannabis industry, equity, community relations and public health. Nuestra is certified by the Cannabis Control Commission as an Economic Empowerment Applicant, signifying that the applicant demonstrates experience in or business practices that promote economic empowerment in disproportionately impacted communities. Their plan involves modifying the existing structure and accommodating additional parking on-site.
- I am also signing a provisional HCA with The Green Lady at 740 Beacon Street. This Newton Centre site is a former auto body shop set back from the street just east of Langley Road. The Green Lady currently operates a retail marijuana establishment on Nantucket and is a family owned and operated business. The company is certified by the Massachusetts Supplier Diversity Office as both a Minority Business and a Women Business Enterprise. The Green Lady will renovate the building and create surface parking. It has indicated it is willing to make transportation infrastructure improvements to the intersection of Beacon and Union Streets.
- I am also signing a provisional HCA with Pharmacannis Massachusetts Inc., which is known as Verilife at 131 Rumford Avenue, close to Nightcap's Corner in Auburndale. I previously executed an HCA with a different operator for this site, but they subsequently withdrew their application. Verilife currently operates fourteen (14) medical and retail marijuana locations across several states, including two in Massachusetts. Verilife brings experience in the cannabis industry along with commitments to equity, public health, and community relations. The site is located in an area with a mix of uses, including Newton's Resource Recovery Center. The site is also near 241 Riverview Avenue, which is the anticipated site for Curaleaf with whom I entered into an HCA for a Marijuana Research Facility (no retail sales) earlier this year. Verilife will be constructing a new building and parking on what is currently a vacant parcel.

Status of Previous Host Community Agreements Granted

The City of Newton can issue special permits for a total of eight marijuana retailers. I previously entered into HCAs with five companies. With the addition of the three HCAs described above, we will have reached our maximum of eight locations (pending approval of Special Permits and licensing by the Cannabis Control Commission). Only one retailer, Garden Remedies at 697 Washington Street in Newtonville, is currently open. Please see below for an update on the other four companies.

- Cypress Tree, at 24-26 Elliot Street in Upper Falls just off Rt. 9, received both

a provisional HCA from me and a special permit from the City Council. They are awaiting licensing approval from the state's Cannabis Control Commission (CCC).

- Ascend Mass at 1089 Washington Street/58 Cross Street, near West Newton Square, received both a provisional HCA from me and a special permit from the City Council and is awaiting licensing approval from the state's CCC.
- Union Twist at 1158 Beacon Street, near Four Corners, received a provisional HCA from me and recently withdrew their special permit petition from the City Council's Land Use Committee. They indicated their intention to resubmit their petition with a revised plan to raze the existing building and include more parking.
- MedMen at 232 Boylston Street, in the former Shreve, Crump & Low building next to Chestnut Hill Square, received a provisional HCA from me and recently filed their special permit petition with the City Clerk on Nov. 9, 2020.

One Other Host Community Agreement

- Curaleaf Processing is a *Marijuana Research Facility* proposed at 241 Riverview Avenue in Auburndale. I signed a provisional HCA with Curaleaf and they will be seeking a special permit from the City Council. This is solely a research facility and there will be no sales of marijuana or marijuana products.

The Newton Planning Department maintains a webpage for marijuana business approvals [here](#).

Important Step for Armory

We took an important step this week in the process of transforming the West Newton Armory on Washington Street into affordable housing.

The nine members of the Joint Advisory Planning Group (JAPG) voted unanimously on Tuesday to recommend the City purchase the former Armory just outside West Newton Square from the Commonwealth for \$1 to use for 100% affordable housing.



The Armory would be a rare opportunity to provide an all affordable project where 100% of the units would be permanently available for lower income individuals, families, veterans or older people to have an opportunity to have a home in Newton.

The Advisory Group, chaired by former City Councilor, Ted Hess Mahan, detailed its findings and recommendations in a report to the City

Council's Real Property Reuse Committee. The report includes the history of the Armory; explores the outcomes of other Massachusetts Armories that have been reimaged; investigates potential municipal uses other than affordable housing at the site; and examines the financial feasibility of converting the Armory into affordable housing.

A housing consultant, Affirmative Investments, paid for through a \$200,000 state grant, assisted the JAPG in the technical examination of the financial feasibility and likelihood of converting the Armory into affordable housing. In its report, Affirmative Investments found that three of the four hypothetical scenarios for redeveloping the Armory into affordable were financially feasible. The only scenario that was deemed unlikely was attempting to redevelop housing within the existing Armory without altering the historic structure at all since the building, its windows and large drill hall do not work for housing.

Two of the viable scenarios involve preserving the front of the building (a.k.a., the “head house”) of the Armory while replacing the rear drill shed with a new addition connected to the historic front façade. The third viable scenario involves removing the Armory entirely and building new. The financial analyses show that the partial preservation or fully new construction of either family or senior/special population housing could be built and financed by accessing a variety of federal, state, and local funding sources for affordable housing. The scenarios that Affirmative Investments explored ranged from 33 to 53 housing units.

Click [here](#) to find the 39 page JPEG report as well as, the the appendix, the Affirmative Investments analysis.

The City Council’s Real Property Reuse Committee will be holding a public hearing on the Armory on Wednesday, Dec.16 at 7:00 p.m. Tune in and/or speak up. (The Zoom link will be available on the preceding Friday.)

Police Update

I met this week with ten of the eleven members of the Newton Police Department who volunteered to think deeply about NPD and provide feedback and ideas. They are committed to fulfilling NPD’s mission of improving the quality of life for all Newtonians, preventing crime, solving problems and enforcing the law, all while guaranteeing respect and dignity for each individual.

I walked out of our meeting with great pride in and gratitude for our police officers. They care deeply about our community. They shared with me their commitment to continuous improvement. They take seriously their role in keeping us safe and providing help to people in crisis (whether from mental health, substance use or other reasons), all while ensuring a bias-free response.

In the midst of a police chief search, a community task force considering reforms, a pandemic and a national movement to rethink policing, our officers – both the rank and file and the commanders – continue to work hard and serve honorably.

A consultant selection team which included four Newton Police Reform Task Force members (Chair Sonja Spears, Malick Ghachem, Hattie Kerwin Derrick and Rob Lowe) and Chief Operating Officer Jonathan Yeo selected the Dorchester-based firm of Strategy Matters to help with the recommendations and drafting of the Task Force report due to me on February 1. They used a public bid process and finalist interviews. I reviewed the recommendation and bid documents and signed off on the selection.

The Strategy Matters team is led by three former officers of the Boston Police Department and includes specialists in social work, diversity, equity and inclusion.

The team will engage with our community, the Newton Police Department and the Task Force. They will assist in reviewing reform ideas and legal constraints as well as analyzing our strengths and challenges. They will be lending their expertise on organizational change, and providing insights to address systemic racism in policing.

You can learn more about the firm at www.strategymatters.org.

Simultaneously (and collaboratively) the firm selected to help with the City's Police Chief search, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), will be moving forward. The IACP is helping recruit and evaluate candidates internally and externally for our permanent Police Chief. The IACP will assist me in writing a candidate profile for what Newton is looking for in our next Chief.

One of their first steps will be soliciting input from members of the department, community leaders (including the chair of the Task Force) and the community at large on the skills, experiences, qualities, traits and interests to inform the profile. Our final job posting will be shared with the community, posted online and shared across the country via the Police Chief magazine, social media and digital messaging, and diversity policing resources and professional associations. IACP will also actively recruit candidates, including people of color and women. I am looking forward to the input and recommendations from the [nine-person selection committee](#).

I welcome your input on the qualities I should prioritize as we search for a new Police Chief. Email me at rfuller@newtonma.gov with your ideas and suggestions. The Newton Police Reform Task Force also welcomes continued input at NPRTaskForce@newtonma.gov. In addition to sharing your thoughts via email, we will solicit input on these parallel processes via two community surveys — more to come soon on both.

City Council Special Election

At their meeting this Monday, Nov. 16, the City Council will start the process of setting a date for a Special Election to fill two at-large City Council seats left vacant by the election of Councilor Jake Auchincloss to the United States Congress and the tragic death last week of Councilor Jay Ciccone.

Councilor Ciccone held one of the two at-large seats on the City Council from Ward 1 (representing Nonantum and parts of Newton Corner), and similarly, Councilor Auchincloss held one of two at-large seats from Ward 2 (Newtonville). Candidates for their seats need to live in the respective wards, but run citywide.

The Newton City Charter gives the City Council responsibility for setting municipal election dates. The date of the Special Election must be within 120 days of the date in which the City Council vote is taken. A number of factors are taken into account in setting a date. These include allowing time for candidates to collect signatures of registered Newton voters on their nomination papers (150 needed for at-large candidates' names to appear on the ballot), ballot printing, mailing of ballots, etc. The timeline now looks like a vote by the City Council in December and the special election in late February or March.

Simultaneously, I'm working with the City Clerk, the Secretary of State, Gov. Baker and our state legislative delegation to get legislation passed to extend mail-in and early in-person voting allowed for Newton's Special Election. The legislation that

allowed mail-in and early in-person voting to be done so successfully for the state primary and general election expires at the end of this calendar year.

Four More Weeks for Yard Waste Collection

We have four weeks left to get leaves bagged for curbside pick-up.

The last week of yard waste collection is December 7th. But, this collection schedule is weather dependent, so if it snows heavily, the collection service could be postponed or cancelled. Use the Recycle Right Newton App to be notified of any collection schedule changes. Download the free app from the [App Store](#) or [Google Play](#).

Yard waste (along with our trash and recycling carts) needs to be at the curb no later than 7:00 a.m. on collection day or as early as 4:00 p.m. the day before.

Please bag, mulch or compost your leaves and *do not* rake leaves into the street (unless they are concurrently being collected by a landscaper), and never push leaves into storm drains. Leaves blocking storm drains can cause flooding and create safety concerns for motorists and pedestrians.



We could also use your help: residents are encouraged to remove leaves from storm drains near your home, when possible and if feasible; you may call Customer Service (617) 796-1000 (M-F 8:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.) or the Utilities Division 617-796-1640 (M-F 7:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.) to request a drain be cleared.

FYI: State law bans yard waste from disposal in your regular trash. Placing yard waste in the blue or green cart may result in rejection. Review Newton's yard waste collection [guidelines](#).

GREEN TIP: Help pollinators; place fallen leaves in your garden bed. Learn more about the benefits [here](#).

Middle-Income Apartments Available at Trio

Trio, Newtonville's new rental apartments on the corner of Washington Street and Walnut Street, is still accepting applications for nine of its middle-income affordable housing units.

What's available?

- Two studio apartments set at 100% of the area median income (AMI) - \$1,784 monthly rent
- Three one-bedroom apartments set at 120% AMI - \$2,492 monthly rent
- Four two-bedroom apartments set at 120% AMI - \$2,804 monthly rent.

Maximum household income limits are (a) for 100% AMI studios: 1-person household, \$79,310; 2-person household, \$90,640 and (b) for 120% AMI units: 1-

person household, \$95,172; 2-person household, \$108,768; 3-person household, \$122,364; 4-person household, \$135,960.

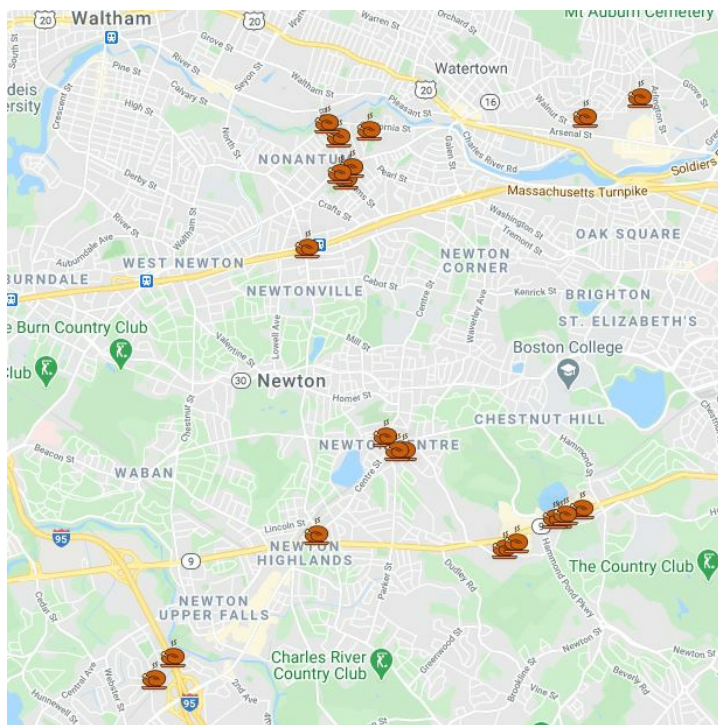
(Utilities are not included in the monthly rent. Tenants will pay their own gas heat and hot water and cooking, electricity, water and sewer. Parking is also not included and is estimated to be approximately \$200/month.)

Interested households should email lrubin@tccrealestate.com or call (617) 313-7845 to obtain a Waiting List Application. As applicants reach the top of the Waiting List, they will be contacted by the Leasing Office to move forward by filling out a Lease Application. For reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities, please use the same email or phone number. For TTY Services, dial 711. Free translation is available.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

P.S. The 2020 Newton Turkey Trot will be a Virtual Edition spanning the Thanksgiving season, Saturday, Nov. 21 to Sunday, Nov. 29. The race proceeds will go to the [Newton Food Pantry](#) and the [Travis Roy Foundation's Ethan Wang Fund](#). Sign up at newtonturkeytrog.org for a Virtual 5K or Virtual mile to run on your own.



P.P.S. Looking for a restaurant for Thanksgiving take-out or dine-in? Check out the directory of area restaurants open on Thanksgiving or offering special to-go Thanksgiving menu items. Click on this map for a list of locations.

