

Mayor's Update

COVID-19 Update and Losses

Newton has an additional 95 new positive COVID-19 cases reported over the seven days between Nov. 11 through yesterday, Nov. 18, bringing the cumulative number of confirmed cases to 1,302. In comparison, we had 50 positive people in Newton test positive during the previous six days (Nov. 5- Nov. 11) and 44 positive cases from Oct. 28 – Nov. 5.



Clearly, we're continuing to see an increase in cases and the increase is significant.

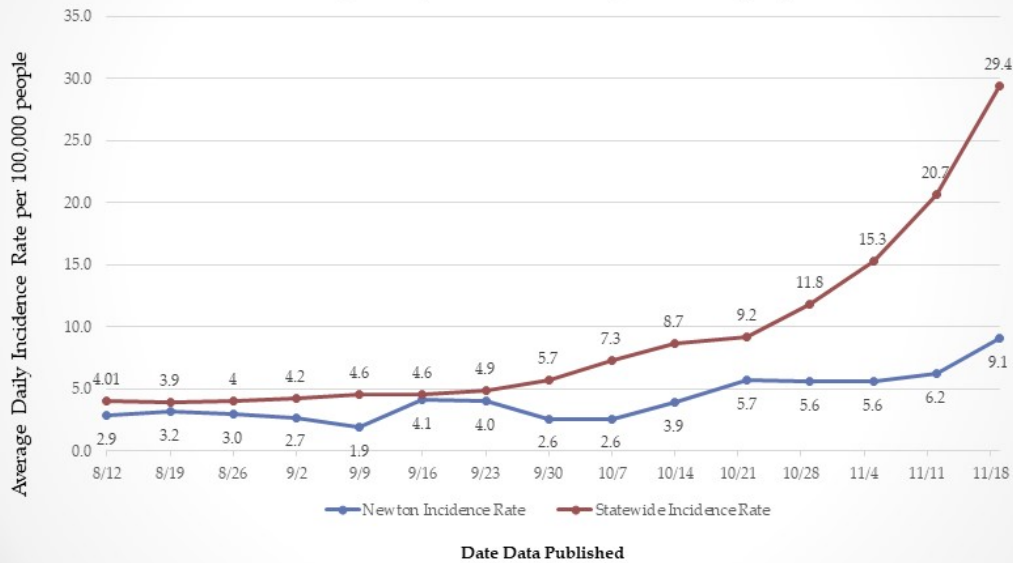
Another way we can track this increase is that one hundred and seventeen (117) Newton residents tested positive for COVID-19 during the current two-week reporting period used by the state (Nov. 1 – 14). During the previous state reporting period (Oct. 25 – Nov. 7), there were 80. This difference of 37 people is concerning, as is the total number of cases already confirmed this month – 165. This count only two weeks into November already exceeds October's total cases. (In October, Newton had 152 cases with 94 in September. Our highest case count occurred in April with 507 confirmed cases, and the fewest was in June, with just 16.)

Contract tracing has found cases among varied groups of people and spread through a myriad of everyday activities. Some of the new cases are among students in local colleges or residents of long-term care/assisted living facilities. More are everyday exposures such as within a household, among sports teams, at workplaces or at gatherings among non-household members. Some continue to be unknown.

The case increase is reflected in Newton's average daily incidence rate. An average of 9.1 Newton residents per day per 100,000 people were confirmed to have COVID-19 in the period from Nov. 1 to Nov. 14. Statewide, the average daily incidence rate for that period is 29.4 per 100,000 people. The incidence rate, paired with the positivity rate, together determine which color coded COVID-19 group Newton is a part of each week.

Incidence Rate*

Average Daily Incidence Rate per 100,000 people



*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
1,302

Total Deaths
148

*As of 11/18

Newton's positivity rate for the current reporting period is 0.50%, meaning less than 1% of the Newton residents who were tested for COVID-19 in the past two weeks tested positive. Statewide, the positivity rate is 3.05 percent.

Newton remains in the green group as classified by the state, which is the designation for communities where the average number of new cases per day is less than 10 per 100,000 people. Four of Newton's neighbors last week were also designated as green – Brookline, Needham, Wellesley and Weston. But, now all but Newton (9.1) and Needham (7.6) are yellow – Boston (31.5), Brookline (10.9), Waltham (21.9), Watertown (19.2), Wellesley (13.7) and Weston (16.9).

This week, again, I need to report the loss of three more Newton residents who died with COVID-19. The total number of Newtonians lost to this virus since the first of April is now 148, a toll on our City that seemed unimaginable when our awareness of the virus began. May the memory of these mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, friends and neighbors be a blessing to all those who knew and loved them.

Newton Public Schools Data

There were eight additional positive cases in the Newton Public Schools this week with a test date between Nov. 12 - 18. Three are in-person/hybrid students, two in-person/hybrid staff and three DLA/remote students. An updated NPS Data Dashboard is posted on Newton's COVID-19 Data [website](#).

New Testing Program in the Newton Public Schools

Newton applied to participate in the first phase of a new school-based testing program and has been selected for Phase 1. The Abbott BinaxNOW COVID-19 testing initiative will allow schools to test symptomatic students and staff and receive test results rapidly. (Please note that the testing is for students and staff who become symptomatic during the school day; people who feel unwell should not come to school.) These antigen tests will help schools identify infected individuals and their close contacts more quickly to help stop the spread.

Newton is required to take a number of steps before this testing program can begin, and we are hopeful we will have it up and running by early January.

More information about the program is available [here](#).



Everyone Can Make Thanksgiving Safer

The Centers for Disease Control reports 1 million new positive cases have been identified in the country over just the past seven days so the chance of transmitting COVID-19 during Thanksgiving travel and gatherings is increasingly possible.

The safest way to celebrate Thanksgiving this year is to celebrate only with people in your household.

If you do plan to spend Thanksgiving with people outside your household, take steps to make your celebration safer. Don't be part of the chain of transmission.

Follow the [Massachusetts Travel Order](#):

- The Massachusetts Travel Order is just that – an order, not an advisory.
- All visitors entering Massachusetts, including returning residents, from **higher risk states** must complete a [Massachusetts Travel Form](#) and quarantine for 14 days upon arrival in Massachusetts or produce a negative COVID-19 PCR test result that has been administered up to 72-hours prior to arrival in Massachusetts. Failure to comply may result in a \$500 fine per day. Beginning on Saturday, only two states are currently considered lower risk: Vermont and Hawaii.
- *This order applies even for “just for the day” Thanksgiving celebrations.* Driving to Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Connecticut, or New York to celebrate? You are required to follow the travel order and quarantine and/or get a negative test.
- Check this [website](#) for a full, up-to-date list of the COVID risk designation for states. (It does change.)
- If your COVID-19 test result has not been received prior to arrival, visitors and residents must quarantine until they receive a negative test result.
- Testing for children, 10 years and younger, who are traveling with an adult

from their household is not required. Children under age 10 who travel must follow the quarantine or testing plan their parent elects.

Keep gatherings small or, better yet, virtual.

- Limit in person holiday gatherings to people you live with or a small group with whom you are regularly in contact.
- If you must gather in person, wear a mask except when eating and drinking, clean your hands often and stay at least 6 feet away from people you don't live with. *This includes while watching football, eating a Thanksgiving meal or shopping on Black Friday!*
- Indoor gatherings at private residences in Massachusetts have a maximum size limit of 10 persons, and outdoor gatherings cannot exceed 25 people per Governor Baker's order. [mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-state-of-emergency](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-state-of-emergency)
- Anyone with symptoms or awaiting test results should not attend gatherings.

Find more information about enjoying a safe Thanksgiving.

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](https://www.cdc.gov/)
- [Massachusetts Department of Public Health](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-state-of-emergency)

We Want to Hear from You

We need your input as we move forward with two important initiatives.

1. Zoning Redesign

Zoning Redesign is the City of Newton's multi-year effort to update, clarify and rewrite Newton's Zoning Ordinance. (Learn more at www.newtonma.gov/zoningredesign). Our Zoning Ordinance governs what can be built on a particular property, where buildings, homes and uses can be located as well as the shape of structures. This matters for sustainability, types & affordability of housing, the viability of our village centers and how our city looks and feels.

The City of Newton's Department of Planning & Development is reaching out around this important project. This stage of "Zoning Redesign: Where We Are Now" is focused on (1) updating Newton community members and on (2) getting feedback on what questions the City Council should focus on in 2021.

Join us for a forum that includes a presentation,* ample time for small group discussion, and opportunities for you to tell us what questions should be explored and how to best communicate with you in the coming year. Join us on Tuesday, December 2 from 7-9 p.m. and/or Wednesday, December 3 from 12-2 p.m. Please RSVP [here](#).

*This presentation will be posted on December 4 on the Zoning Redesign web page for you to view at your convenience. The link to the Zoning Redesign web page is [here](#). We will also have a Zoning Redesign survey so that you can provide your ideas and feedback in addition to the "Zoning Redesign: Where We Are Now" forums.

2. Police Chief Search

We're moving forward with our search for a new Police Chief. We've hired the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and appointed the nine-member selection committee. Now we want to hear from all of you to find out what characteristics you believe are important for our next leader of the Newton Police Department.

Please take the brief, confidential, survey online [here](#). It should take less than 5 minutes.

Be Careful: Lock Doors and Windows

We're thankful to be one of the safest cities in the country with relatively few break-ins or burglaries. But that doesn't mean we're immune. The Newton Police Department and our neighboring community's departments have recently seen an uptick in attempted break-ins. In Newton, the attempts (none have been successful yet) have occurred in Oak Hill and Newton Centre in particular.

Take a simple precaution; make sure doors and windows are locked.



(Photo: Renovation and expansion of the Oak Hill Middle School on Wheeler Road is on track to be complete and ready for students to start the school year next fall. Our contractor poured the foundation this week. The framing of the three new classrooms will follow so work can continue inside over the winter.)

Yard Waste Collection Delays

Like almost every aspect of our lives, COVID-19 is also affecting our yard waste collection schedule. Waste Management has several employees who need to quarantine, making it difficult for them to fully staff drivers for all our Newton routes.

High winds last week that seemingly blew all the leaves off our trees overnight didn't help the situation. We're currently seeing a huge volume of bags curbside. This week the yard collection team will pick up an estimated 125 truckloads (10 cubic yards each) compared to 70 loads during the peak week last year.

All this has led to significant collection delays.

We would be grateful if you can summon another round of patience.

We're splitting yard waste collection into two weeks to compensate for the several days it's taking to collect each day's route.



This means that yard waste collection for this week will cover areas that have Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday trash days. The Monday route was completed as of Wednesday afternoon. Tuesday's route is in progress, and Wednesday's route will be started tomorrow (Friday). So, if your trash collection day is Monday or Tuesday, please wait until the week of Nov. 30 to set out your yard waste again.

For people who have Wednesday, Thursday or Friday collection days, please leave your yard waste out at the curb now, but once those bags are collected, don't set out more bags until the week of Nov. 30.

Regular weekly collection is anticipated to resume on November 30. We're so sorry that we will be unable to address missed yard waste pickup requests until that time.

Want to check for updates on yard waste collection? Click [here](#).

Resolving Water Meter Transmission Woes

During the 2010-2012 period, the City replaced all residential water meters and installed a modern meter reading transmission system that allows DPW/Utilities employees to remotely collect data on water usage for billing without entering homes. The system, with an estimated lifespan of 20 years, worked well until this past year. Nearly 32% of the water meter transmission units ("MTUs") began to malfunction and not transmit readings. The MTU is a gray fixture located on the outside of homes that is connected to the meter inside and transmits data to the City's dispersed network of eight antennae.

The good news is that in homes where the MTU has failed, the actual water meters have continued to accurately record water usage. However, the City has needed to estimate water use for billing purposes and/or request homeowners to submit a photo of the meter's serial number and reading. Affected homeowners have been sent letters explaining the problem, outlining how estimated readings are calculated, and providing instructions for emailing the actual readings to us.

The City is working with the meter system manufacturer, Mueller Systems, to correct the problem - at their expense. Unfortunately, the pandemic has created supply chain problems that have led to backlogs in the manufacture and shipment of MTUs and additional antennae that Mueller has committed to install at the eight City locations to collect the MTU data.

Of the 29,000 MTUs in the City system, approximately 8,540 are not functioning. Our Utilities Division has worked hard to get Mueller to promptly ship these units to the City; currently, Mueller is only able to provide shipments of 300 to 400 units every few weeks. This is frustratingly slow.

The Utilities Division will continue to communicate with the affected homeowners until the MTUs are fully replaced. Do you have a question? Email waterbilling@newtonma.gov.

Tax Rates Set

The City Council on Monday night set the tax rates for the coming fiscal year. The residential tax rate will be \$10.76, and the commercial rate \$20.12, both per \$1,000 in assessed property value. (Last year, the tax rates were \$10.44 and \$19.92 respectively.)

The owner of a single-family home assessed at the median value in Newton of \$1,055,600 will pay \$461.94 more in property taxes for fiscal year 2021. The owners of a commercial property assessed at the median value in Newton of \$1,016,850 will pay \$595.31 more in property taxes. (The median value of the 16,941 single-family homes in Newton and the 722 commercial properties were \$1,043,900 and \$997,800 respectively in the previous fiscal year 2020.)

The City of Newton “splits” the tax rate, placing a bigger burden on commercial property owners instead of setting a single rate which would have had residential and commercial property owners paying the same rate per \$1,000 of valuation.

Residential property values make up slightly under 90% of the assessed taxable value of all properties in the City, while commercial property values make up slightly over 10%. In November of each year when the tax rate is set, the City Council adopts a “Residential Factor” and votes to “split” the tax rate, resulting in an intended shift from the residential taxpayers onto the commercial, industrial and personal property taxpayers.

The maximum allowable Residential Factor for the City of Newton is 175%, or 1.75 times the taxable value of all commercial properties. If a factor of 175% is adopted, the commercial class becomes responsible for 17.61% of the tax levy. That number then is subtracted from 100% to arrive at the residential proportion of 82.39% of the tax levy.

This year, because we know so many of our local businesses are struggling to stay in business, I asked the City Council to consider shifting a slightly smaller percentage of the tax burden onto commercial property owners.

In keeping with my request, this past Monday evening the City Council voted to shift 172%, (1.72) of the tax burden to the commercial sector. The decision means owners of commercial, industrial and business personal property (whose property represent \approx 10% of Newton’s taxable value) will be responsible for 17.3% of the total amount of taxes collected. Residential property owners (whose property represents \approx 90 percent of Newton’s taxable value) will be responsible for 82.7% of the total taxes collected.

Want more information? Click [here](#).

(Photo: What a pleasure to welcome Cacao to Newton

Highlands. Leo Baez and Perla Rosario recently opened their second shop selling nuts, chocolate and coffee at 23 Lincoln Street. The word on the street is that their hot chocolate is heavenly.)



Funding Human Services

The City of Newton will receive up to \$300,000 in a second allocation of Community Development Block Grant Coronavirus (CDBG-CV) Program funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

The City is making these funds available to agencies which provide human services to low and moderate income Newton residents. We've previously made \$300,000 available for social services programs in Newton in the first round of CARES Act funding in May of this year.

More specifically, these additional funds will be made available to agencies who provide direct services to income eligible residents experiencing hardships due to COVID-19. In particular, we're focusing on the urgent needs including (but not limited to) for assistance with paying for utilities, child care, mental health services and more. Through this Human Services Program, the City of Newton will provide financial support to prospective nonprofit organizations and municipal departments whose programs will provide a direct service to Newton's most vulnerable residents.

Organizations and municipal departments can respond to the request for proposals by completing an application, found at newtonma.gov/CDBGHumanServices. The application deadline is Wednesday, December 9 at 5:00 p.m.

Grab & Go Food

So many people in Newton are in need of food. Please pick up a bag of free food with 2 or 3 days of breakfasts and lunches inside. The food is available to ALL Newton students and residents at no cost.

Since Newton's Grab & Go food program began in April, more than 250,000 meals have been provided.

The program operates out of Newton North (457 Walnut Street but go to the Theatre entrance on Elm Road which is one way from Lowell towards Walnut) and Newton South High Schools (140 Brandeis Road) each weekday, 10 a.m. to noon.

Our website will be updated if there is a schedule change due to winter weather.

Visit newtonma.gov/grab&go for weather updates and other information.

Thanksgiving Week Schedule

Grab & Go meals will be available next week on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. Grab & Go will be closed Thursday (11/26) and Friday (11/27) for the Thanksgiving holiday.

January Schedule Change

Currently, Newton's Grab & Go program runs every weekday out of Newton North and South from 10 a.m. to 12 noon. Starting Monday, January 4, meals will be available three days a week – Monday, Wednesday and Friday (both at Newton North and Newton South High Schools). Bags will still contain three days of breakfast and lunch items, and extra items may be added if a weather-related closure is expected.

Many other programs are available for families and individuals who need additional food/financial resources:

Newton Food Pantries – information on the three Newton food pantries can be found here: newtonma.gov/food.

Fuel Assistance – Eligible Newton residents (renters and homeowners) can apply for fuel assistance to pay for heating bills. To see if you are eligible visit: www.newtonma.gov/fuelassistance

Rental and Mortgage Assistance – Details on the City of Newton's Emergency Housing Relief Program, including eligibility requirements, can be found [here](#).

Social Services – For more resources and information on Newton Social Services, visit newtonma.gov/socialservices.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

P.S. This holiday season, things are a little different, but we can still celebrate with a festive drive-through display of holiday lights, music and surprises. All are welcome to Mayor Fuller's Celebration on Tuesday, December 8 (rain date Dec.

9). Stay in your car but roll down your windows and drive slowly between 5:30 pm and 6:00 pm through the driveway at Newton City Hall, 1000 Commonwealth Avenue.



Bring an unwrapped gift (ages newborn -10 years) to support the Newton Police Department's "stuff a cruiser" for the Village Bank's Gift Drive. Please consider supporting the Newton food pantries by bringing a grocery gift card. Mayor Fuller will greet you as volunteers collect your donations in a contact free manner. Look for

Frosty and other special friends along the drive-by route. Newton Community Pride volunteers will be handing out a thank you gift for your support. This event is sponsored by Newton Parks, Recreation and Culture, and Newton Community Pride. Special thanks to Jerry Reilly for the giant puppets! Please consider purchasing your donations locally and pick up a takeout dinner after your drive-through visit. (Stay safe and buy local!) For more information, call 617-796-1540.

