

## Mayor's Update

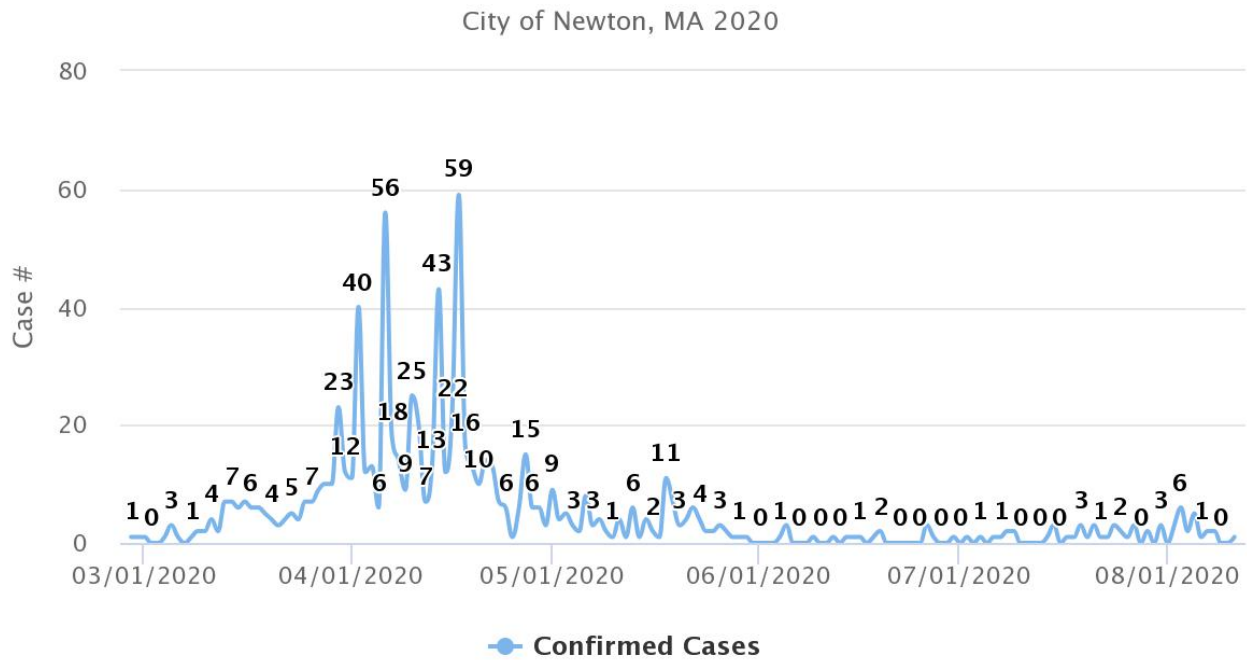
### COVID-19 Update and Losses

There are 839 confirmed cases of COVID-19 among Newton residents, according to preliminary data through August 11, 2020. For the month of August so far, 21 cases have been confirmed. This compares to 33 and 16 during the entire months of July and June respectively.



We have had two more Newtonians die this week who tested positive for COVID-19, bringing the heartbreaking total to 127 people since the last week of March. Our condolences and our virtual embrace go to the many families and friends who have been touched by this insidious infection.

### Newton Cases by Symptom Onset Date



Graph data through 8/11/2020

**COVID-19 in Newton**

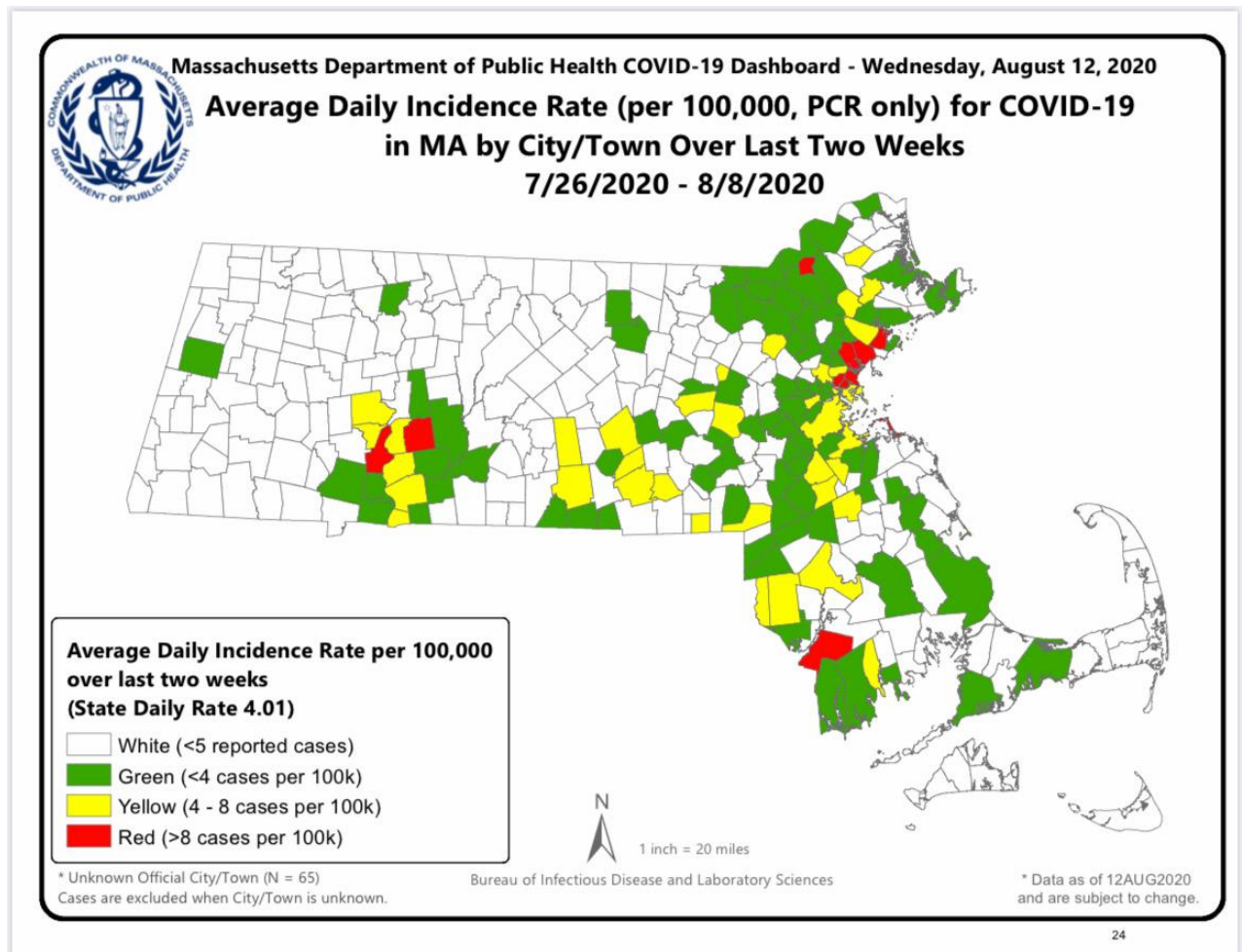
<b>Total Cases</b>
<b>839</b>
<b>Total Deaths</b>
<b>127</b>
*As of 8/11

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health updated the way it reports city and town COVID-19 case data a few days ago. Each city or town is depicted on the Average Daily Case Rate [map](#) (see page 24) below with a color -- red, yellow, green or white -- that represents that community's average daily case rate per 100,000 people during the previous two-week period. Red indicates higher risk (4 communities), yellow moderate risk, green lower risk, and white low risk communities.

For the two-week period from July 26 through August 8, Newton's case rate is in the "green (lower risk) category," signifying an average of

fewer than 4 cases per 100,000 people confirmed each day during those two weeks.

Most of Newton's geographic neighbors are green or white. We have one important exception in that Boston has a higher risk designation (yellow) with an average of 4 to 8 cases per 100,000 reported.



These numbers for Newton are reassuring for the moment. But, they will only continue if we all remain diligent in maintaining physical distance, washing hands and wearing masks. It's also important to wear the mask or face covering correctly – covering both our nose and mouth and fitting snugly against the sides of our face. When outside or inside, please know that neighbors who are at high risk may be nearby. Even when briefly walking (or running or biking) by someone else, wear a face covering.

Some statewide COVID-19 data is updated daily on the [state website](#) and others weekly on Wednesdays at the end of the day.

### Recommended NewCAL Site

The Newton Center for Active Living (NewCAL) Working Group today formally recommended to me that the existing Senior Center site in Newtonville be the location for the new community center focusing on programs and services for our older residents.

The Newton Council on Aging also unanimously voted to support moving forward at the Newtonville site. (The Council on Aging previously voted to support the program proposed for this new facility.)

I agree with their recommendations.

The decision to locate the new center at the existing Senior Center site at 345 Walnut Street comes after hundreds of public meetings, thousands of comments, ideas and suggestions from residents and businesspeople, and more than two years evaluating 150 different potential sites.

The decision came down to two final locations – building a new center or renovating and adding to the existing building at the current location or building a new facility at the Newton Centre Triangle Parking Lot. After considering the locations, access to public transit, the length of time it would take to complete, impact to the neighborhood, community support, cost and other factors, the NewCAL Working Group voted unanimously for the Newtonville site.

There is still much ahead of us – the City Council review, addressing parking, the decision on preserving some of the existing building or completely new construction, many design decisions, and finding a temporary location for senior programming during construction.

In the meantime, I want to thank the Council on Aging, NewCAL Working Group, Director of Senior Services Director Jayne Colino, Building Commissioner Josh Morse, Commissioners of Park, Recreation and Culture Bob DeRubeis and Nicole Banks and the many people who helped get us to this point.

You can read the full letter from the NewCAL Working Group [here](#) and find more information about NewCAL [here](#).



*(Photo: Rev. Dr. Brandon Thomas Crowley, Pastor of the Myrtle Baptist Church, moderating tonight's community conversation with author Ibram X. Kendi. Sho Grant is the ASL interpreter for this inaugural event of Overdue: Confronting Racism in Newton.)*

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## School Decision on Friday

This Friday, Aug. 14, the School Committee (of which I am a member) will vote on how we begin the new school year in September. The School Committee has two choices. First, we can allow parents and guardians to choose either a “hybrid” educational model with each student spending some time in a classroom and some time online with distance learning or an all online “distance” educational model. Second, we can vote for only an all “distance” educational model with online learning for all students. (There is one important exception. Regardless of the vote, high-needs students will have in-person learning four or five days a week.)

Notably, whatever the vote, those teachers at high risk for COVID-19 will teach remotely.

We've heard from many members of our community – epidemiologists to grocery clerks, teachers and administrators, people working statewide on COVID-19 and education, students and hundreds of parents.

People hold a variety of opinions and points of view. Here's a sampling from emails I've received:

*"I strongly believe that reopening schools to any degree of in-person learning poses undue risk ..."*

*"I worry that the choice to default to online learning will create a cycle of inequity ... In-person learning is the only equitable solution ..."*

*"My children NEED in-person learning, they need it for their social and emotional development and most importantly they need it to stay healthy and sane."*

*" .... We are gambling with the lives of our children and teachers and school staff."*

*"Younger students, like my kindergartner and second grader, don't engage or learn well through virtual sessions."*

*"We must put our efforts into creating a robust distance learning program ..."*

*" ... it is with the full understanding of the medical risks associated with a pandemic ... that I am writing you to implore you to open schools this year and allow in person education."*

This is an extraordinarily difficult time for all of us, grappling with many uncertainties, changing information, significant health and financial concerns, and the resulting anxiety and sleepless nights. The decision on how best to provide our students with the excellent and equitable education Newton is known for this September is also difficult, but the time has come to decide.

I know all of us are bringing our best minds and our best hearts to this decision. We're focusing on the needs of our almost 12,700 students and 2,000+ teachers and staff. The decision will be grounded in safety, social and emotional health, equity and excellence in teaching and learning.

We'll move forward also knowing that no matter what is decided on Friday, the plan will likely evolve as the weeks pass. Our education team recognizes this and is making sure we can move seamlessly from distance online learning to in-person or vice versa.

Get Zoom instructions [here](#) to watch the meeting on Friday at 3 p.m.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

P.S. Thanks go to the staff from our our Parks, Recreation & Culture Department and our Newton Public Schools who served as counselors at Camp Echo Bridge. Optimism and joy filled campers' days. Watch as Newton resident and young camper Oskar Zoffer models for all of us how to express gratitude.



P.P.S. Are you a Newton history buff? Have fun with the Newton Highlands Area Council's trivia contest and potentially win a gift card to a business in Newton Highlands. Find the questions [here](#), and email your answers by Friday, August 21 to [NewtonHighlandsVirtualTrivia@gmail.com](mailto:NewtonHighlandsVirtualTrivia@gmail.com).

