

Mayor's Update

COVID-19 Update

There are 882 confirmed cases of COVID-19 among Newton residents, according to preliminary data through August 24, 2020. Eight of these cases had a symptom onset date (or test date) between August 19, 2020 (our last update) and August 24, 2020.



Newton has seen an uptick in cases in August compared to July. Importantly, our positivity rate continues to be low, meaning that for the thousands of residents who are tested for COVID-19, only a small fraction of them are positive - a good sign.

We are seeing a change in our case demographics with an increase in younger people testing positive. This may be due to the reticence to test young people early in the pandemic when tests were less available. It may also be due to the reasons people are getting tested now, which includes travel related testing and preparation for medical procedures.

Our Health and Human Services team continues to review data and keep me informed.

The bottom line, though, is that for now we must continue to be vigilant and follow the guidelines of health experts, especially as there are those among us who are particularly vulnerable.

I also want you to know that I will continue to share the heartbreaking losses of Newton residents each week. I will be changing the day of those communications from Wednesdays to Thursdays which will allow us to also share the weekly data the state updates quite late in the day on Wednesday. This data helps us track our local risk level with a calculation of the average daily case count for the preceding fourteen days.

Newton Public Schools Update

The Newton School Committee finished a meeting a short time ago. We had voted a little over a week ago to give parents and caregivers of all students the option of either some in class learning (a.k.a., the hybrid model) or fully distanced learning.

Since then, the Newton Public Schools received information from parents on their preferences and from teachers on their ability to teach in-person.

As a result of this matching of students and teachers, class by class and building by building, NPS made some important adjustments to the plan.

School will start for all students, whether they chose the hybrid model or distance learning, on Wednesday, September 16.

For those elementary students (Kindergarten – Grade 5) who chose in-person

learning, the hybrid model will be phased in starting September 16 with students spending two mornings a week in-person and eventually expanding to two days a week in the classroom on November 1.

The Middle Schools (Grades 6-8) will begin the year with all students working online. The plan calls for students who chose the hybrid model to transition into some in-person classes at the start of the second marking period on November 16.

All students in the High Schools will be learning exclusively online for the foreseeable future. Opportunities will be available for high schoolers to connect in-person with adults and fellow students at the school buildings— to have orientation activities, to create community and connections, to connect with councilors and to participate in extracurricular activities (theatre, sports, music, clubs, etc.), with health and safety protocols in place.

Students (elementary, middle and high school) identified as high need will have in-person opportunities for learning, if they prefer, four or five days a week.

NPS will send out more detailed information to the school community tomorrow. In the meantime, [here](#) is the PowerPoint presentation from the School Committee meeting earlier today which includes more about the reasons behind the plan.

Tentative Agreement with the School Nurses

I'm so pleased to share that last week we reached a tentative agreement with the Newton Public Health Nurses Professional Unit of the Massachusetts Nurses Association which represents the nurses working in Newton's twenty-three school buildings.

Our school nurses are vital in making our schools places where our students are safe and healthy. In this complicated time with a global pandemic, the work our nurses do is particularly critical. They are experienced, professional and compassionate, and have my deep respect and gratitude.

The City and the Nurses' union has been working to finalize the fine print, and the Nurses are scheduled to vote on the agreement tomorrow.

College Students Back on Campus

Like many of us, I am concerned about students returning to colleges and universities in Newton and Greater Boston and the potential for an increase in COVID-19 cases.

Both Newton's Commissioner of Health and Human Services, Deborah Youngblood, and I are committed to the health and safety of our community and thus have been in close contact with Boston College, Lasell University, University of Massachusetts Amherst at the Mt. Ida Campus, William James College, and Hebrew College.

At the local level, the City of Newton does not approve re-opening plans for institutions of higher education. The City did not create the state guidelines that they must follow, nor do we directly oversee their operations. But, if action is required by the City to enforce health and safety guidelines, we will act.

Commissioner Youngblood, HHS staff and I have had multiple meetings with all of the institutions of higher learning regarding their reopening plans. In addition, I have

connected multiple times with Mayor Walsh and the City of Boston regarding Boston College as their campus straddles the two cities.

Our review of all the reopening plans shows that the colleges and universities located here in Newton are following the state guidelines. They have measures for COVID-19 testing as well as facilities for quarantine, isolation and health care if necessary. If student behavior – on campus or off campus – is not aligned with COVID-19 health and safety guidelines, they have protocols for addressing it. The larger institutions have robust health services and students who do not live on campus will be supported by campus health services. In all cases, off campus students will be required to follow the protocols.

I have been asked about whether positive cases among college and university students will appear in Newton's data. The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) recently decided that if the student resides in Newton (i.e., the dorm is in Newton or they are in off campus housing in Newton), those positive cases will be part of Newton's positive cases. They are still deciding if those cases will also be broken out separately and reported at the state level as part of colleges and universities (as they do with elder facilities).

We will continue to be in close dialogue with these institutions and will be monitoring the level of positive cases closely. We will pay close attention to the behaviors, practices, procedures and policies as they unfold in the coming days and months.

If you notice concerning behavior, please notify both the university/college as well as our Health and Human Services Department. The more specific the information, the better.

Dine Local



Our restaurants are open for take-out, sidewalk and inside service. After a tough period, many are hurting and they need our business. Last week, I visited several in Newton Centre (pictured: Jamie Kaye at Jamie's on Union, Evo Chakarov at 11:11 Health Bar, and Gabriel Aguilar at Sol Azteca). I also joined artists (Zeina Skaff Kahhale, Melanie Henriques and Jessica Rymut) decorating dining barriers around outdoor seating areas. The one in the photo is in front of the soon to open "gastro pub" Thistle and Leek (in the former space of Comedor). A team of 20+ Newton artists designed and painted 32 barriers installed by the City in front of restaurants as part of "Newton Al Fresco." Thanks go to Newton Community Pride and all the artists, our Planning Department, Sherwin Williams in



Newton Centre and Swartz Ace Hardware in Nonantum for donating supplies, Councilor Alicia Bowman, and our restaurateurs for working together to create safe, festive areas for us to dine.

Shop Tax Free This Weekend

Our Newton restaurants aren't the only businesses hurting; many of our local shops are struggling too. This Saturday, Aug. 29 and Sunday, Aug. 30 is tax free weekend in Massachusetts and a great opportunity to support our shops right here in Newton that give our villages character, employ our neighbors and donate back to our community. Items for personal use up to \$2,500 can be purchased in person or online without the added the 5% sales tax.

When we shop local, let's keep each other safe. Wear a mask, keep your distance and wash/sanitize your hands. When shopping in person or online, ordering take-out to eat in or dining out, think local, think Newton.

Warmly,

Ruthanne



P.S. Watch *Groundhog Day* on a forty foot screen, the final Newton drive-in movie of the season. You'll be safe and comfortable in your car while parked at the Northland site at 281 Needham Street (the former Marshalls) on Monday, Aug. 31. The movie stars comedian Bill Murray as a weathercaster who inexplicably lives the same day over and over again. (Sounds a bit like our lives these days!) The movie starts at 7:30 p.m. and parking begins at 7:00 p.m. Tickets are \$20 per vehicle. Get more information and purchase tickets [here](#). Thanks Newton Community Pride!

