

Mayor's Update

COVID-19 Update and Losses

We have 1,634 confirmed COVID-19 cases among Newton residents through Thursday, Dec. 3, 2020, an increase of 253 people since we last reported our figures nine days ago through Monday, Nov. 23.

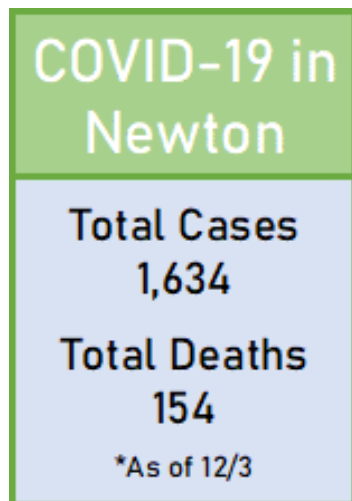
Newton, like so many other cities and towns across the Commonwealth, is seeing a significant increase in people getting infected.



With this high rate of new cases, we are right back where we were at the peak of the first surge. Based on the updated cumulative case graph, Newton is seeing case numbers for people living here rivaling what we saw during the month of April when 507 people tested positive. April remains the highest month thus far, but November is a close second with 444 Newton residents testing positive. (The November count could continue to increase as test results from the end of November are still being reported.)

Over the two-week tracking period from Nov. 15 – 28 used by the state for its reporting period, Newton had 259 new positive tests. Our incidence rate increased to 20.2 cases per 100,000, up from 15.3 during the previous reporting period. Just over 1% of all Newton residents who were tested for COVID-19 tested positive (a.k.a., the positivity rate). That compares to a statewide positivity rate of 3.7 during the same two-week period.

FYI: A lot of Newtonians have had COVID-19 tests. In the last 14 days, 25,577 tests were administered to us, with 186,649 tests in total. (Please note, some of us may have had many repeated tests and the population of Newton is approximately 88,000.)



Newton is again in the yellow group as classified by the state. (Yellow communities with a population of greater than 50,000 have an average number of new cases per day less than 10 per 100,000, or a positivity rate of 4% or less.) Six of our neighbors, Boston, Needham, Waltham, Watertown, Weston and Wellesley are also designated as yellow, while Brookline is experiencing lower rates of COVID-19 right now and is designated green for this current two-week period.

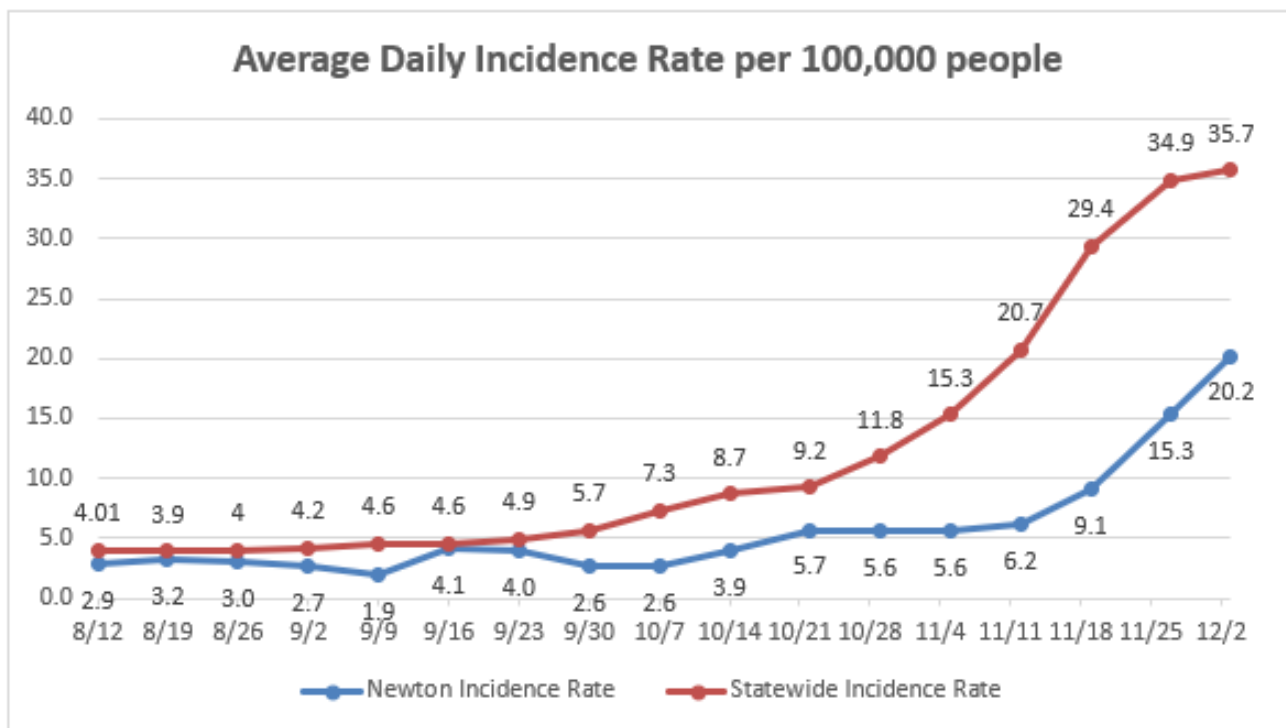
We were all concerned that the Thanksgiving holiday might lead to more transmission of the virus. While investigations are still underway of the most recent cases, it is increasingly clear that gatherings of people who live in different households continue to be an important source of transmission. To break the chain of transmission, we need to avoid unprotected contact with people outside our immediate household, wash/sanitize our hands and stay home if we don't feel

well.

Stopping the spread also means following Gov. Charlie Baker's mandate that requires masks in public. Please, let's respect our neighbors. It's impossible to know if the person near you has a compromised immune system. If you're out taking a walk, jogging or riding a bike, keep your mask on and encourage landscapers and other people working at your home to wear a mask.

You can also help stop the spread by "answering the call." If you test positive for COVID-19, or are identified as a close contact of someone who has tested positive, you can expect to receive a call or a text message from either the [Community Tracing Collaborative](#) (a.k.a., the MA COVID Team) or the Newton Health and Human Services Department. It's very important to respond to the call/text to protect your health and the health of those around you. These public health officials will conduct a case investigation and trace close contacts, and ensure you have the support you need during isolation or quarantine. As a reminder, a close contact is someone who is within 6 feet for longer than 10-15 minutes of a person confirmed to have COVID-19, during the case's infectious period. A case's infectious period begins two days before the case develops symptoms, or two days before specimen collection of a positive test result. Public health officials use these guidelines to identify contacts who must quarantine.

Newton's 2-Week Average Daily Incidence Rate Per 100,000 people over Time



Last week 148 empty chairs stood on the lawn at City Hall memorializing the Newtonians we had lost with COVID-19 as of November 19.

But, now, just fourteen days later, we will have to add six more chairs. One hundred and fifty-four (154) Newton residents tested positive for COVID-19 and have died. The ripple of grief keeps expanding. With the possibility of a vaccine almost here, I hope each of us can find the strength to soldier on, to mask up, and to stay physically apart so fewer of us have to shed tears and mourn.

[Newton Public Schools COVID-19 Cases](#)

A total of 52 people in the Newton Public Schools community have tested positive for COVID-19 since the start of the school year. This is an increase of 9 people since last week. Of the new cases, 2 are in-person/hybrid students, 3 are in-person hybrid staff members and 4 are DLA/Remote students. Find the full dashboard table with data by week [here](#).

Schools Update

Surveillance Testing for Faculty and Staff

I'm pleased that we are beginning voluntary COVID-19 surveillance testing for asymptomatic Newton Public School faculty and staff working in-person with students in our school buildings this month. We are signing a contract with a professional group, [CIC Health](#), for high quality nasal swab PCR tests that will be processed through the reputable labs at the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard.

Having our students and staff have in-person teaching and learning opportunities and making sure we have the health and safety protocols in place to do it as safely as possible has been a high priority for me. As cases in Massachusetts rise, access to surveillance testing is a beneficial addition to the health pillars currently in place (masks, distancing, hand hygiene, staying home when sick).

The City will support the Newton Public Schools by paying for these in-person faculty and staff tests and hopes to be reimbursed through our allocation of CARES Act funding. These funds are scheduled to expire on Dec. 31. If the federal government does not extend this funding, I am committed to continuing to pay for these tests.

We expect to be able to test interested NPS staff working in-person at least once per month and potentially more often.

A few more details of the testing program include:

- This test is offered at no cost to in-person NPS faculty and staff.
- The test is a self-administered, nasal swab PCR test.
- The test is processed through the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard.
- This test is for asymptomatic individuals only.
- This is different from the BinaxNOW state pilot program for symptomatic individuals, which uses an antigen test. That pilot testing program will be administered by Newton HHS through school nurses and is expected to be operational after the new year.
- The testing program is scheduled to begin this month and, as of now, will continue through the end of February.

The well-being of our staff and our students was at the center of the decision and I remain firmly committed to making this investment to support educational outcomes and the social, emotional and physical health of our NPS community.

In-Person Classes in the High Schools

The Newton School Committee on Wednesday approved the plan to provide a hybrid schedule of full days of in-person classes at Newton North and Newton South High Schools at the start of the second semester on Jan. 27. The NPS HyFlex plan has all students being taught the same lesson together, with some participating remotely and others in-person in the classroom.

Over the next few days, high school principals and NPS educators will be sharing detailed information about these plans with students and families, including family information sessions next week. You can read an overview of the high school plan [here](#).

More In-Person Time for Kindergarten, First and Second Graders

At the elementary level, students in K-2 who are in the hybrid learning model will have more time in school starting on Monday, Jan. 4. The school day will continue until 2:00 p.m. for our young learners on their in-person learning days. This change will give our youngest learners four additional hours at school each week, two additional hours for in-person instruction and two for social time with their classmates at lunch and recess.

Put Your Money Where Your Heart Is

Dining

Outdoor dining on public spaces in Boston may be ending, but here in Newton restaurants with sidewalk and outdoor seating can remain open this winter for as long as they wish to offer this convenience. Speaking of Newton restaurants, as we enter the holiday season, now is an excellent time to help out your favorite Newton haunt, perhaps with a gift certificate or a holiday takeout meal. They need our support and patronage more than ever.

Village Center Lighting

You will soon notice lighting improvements in three of our village centers. As part of the ongoing improvements to both West Newton Square and Newtonville village center, lampposts, (like the one in the photo), are being installed to increase visibility for pedestrians and vehicles and add another decorative element to the streetscape for shoppers and village businesses. Also, the City, in concert with the local business community, is installing a series of twinkle lights in Newton Highlands for the holiday season, and the trees in the garden at the intersection of Lincoln and Walnut are already lit up. Enjoy the lighting in the dark of winter as we dine local and shop local.



Parking

Save your quarters. The City continues to offer free parking in all of our village centers to encourage patronage of our local businesses.

Shopping



Our villages and business centers shape our community. From the coffee shops providing that needed jump start in the morning, to boutiques offering that one-of-a-kind gift, to the corner store that is always open and has exactly what you need, it's all right here in Newton. Plus, by putting your money where your heart is, you provide necessary jobs and boost our economy. You create opportunities for minority,

women-owned, and small business people. You also help the environment by staying close to home. So, think local first.

Find out more at nchamber.com/shop-local.

Holiday Gift Drive

For some Newton families, this holiday season is bringing worry about paying the bills instead of the fun of picking out the perfect present for the kids. The Village Bank and Newton Rotary are teaming up with our Newton Health and Human Services Department for our Holiday Gift Drive to provide kids aged newborn to 10 with a gift for the holiday. Donations will be accepted through Tuesday, Dec. 15.

There are many ways to donate:

- Send a tax deductible cash donation to the [Rotary Club of Newton](#) (click on Donate to Newton Rotary Foundation and select Holiday Gift Drive).
- Drop off a new, unwrapped gift or gift card from a local Newton merchant at any Village Bank location, or at drop boxes at Henry Bear's Park in Newtonville or Just Next Door in Auburndale.



Last Chance for Yard Waste

A reminder that next week, Dec. 7 – 11, is the last week of scheduled yard waste/leaf collection this year. You may have noticed some delays in your collection the last few weeks stemming from the impact of COVID-19 on Waste Management drivers. If you set your yard waste out by 7 a.m. on your collection day next week, it will be collected either on your regular collection day or sometime thereafter. Thank you for your patience and cooperation as we bring our yard waste collection season to a close for 2020.



A Safer Route to School

Good news. MassDOT's Safe Routes to School Program has announced they will fund traffic improvements at the intersections at Albemarle Road and Craft Street, North and Craft Streets and Albemarle Road and North Street with an eye toward making it safer for students to walk and bike to and from the Horace Mann Elementary School, F.A. Day Middle School and the Newton Early Childhood

Program.

Specifically, the project as proposed, includes installing a fully actuated traffic signal at the Albemarle Road and Crafts Street intersection as well as installing a rapid flashing beacon crosswalk system at the Albemarle Road and North Street intersection. The signals at both would be coordinated in a closed loop system in order to synchronize the intersections and smooth traffic flow on Crafts Street. The project may also upgrade sidewalks, paving and pavement markings, and/or provide additional traffic calming.

The good news is that it's a great project and planning will begin with a site visit next week. The bad news is that as we work with the MassDOT consultant, AECOM, and the MassDOT District Project Development Engineer to develop this project, they estimate that construction won't begin until the fall of 2024 or even 2025.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

P.S. Learn from Newton's high school students how we can make our holiday celebrations "greener." What are some meaningful and environmentally conscious gift ideas? How can we make more sustainable food choices while maintaining our traditions? What about fast fashion? Explore these



questions and more at a virtual public meeting this Sunday, Dec. 6, from 4:00 – 5:00 p.m.; all ages are welcome. Register [here](#).

P.P.S. Are you looking for an outdoor and socially distant sport to try with your family? With the help of an Eagle Scout, Newton Parks, Recreation & Culture has installed the City's first beginner orienteering course at Auburndale Park. Orienteering is a really fun way to use navigational skills – maps and a compass – to move from point to point in the woods; some enjoy doing it as fast as they can. Maps for the course are available online [here](#). Newton's Park, Recreation & Culture staff have classes and programs to teach the sport of orienteering for people who want to learn. Registration is available online at newtonmarec.com.



P.P.P.S. Newton Community Education winter classes for kids and adults are now open for registration at newtoncommunityed.org. There are several [in-person outdoor classes](#) along

with online programs in Art & Photography, Crafts, Fitness, Technology, Chess, and more.

P.P.P.P.S. *Simple Gestures of Kindness and Small Moments of Connection:* The AARP's Task Force to End Loneliness and Build Community asked Newton to participate in the statewide #ReachOutMA campaign to encourage us to check in with our neighbors who may be experiencing isolation. Thanks go to Jayne Colino, our Director of Senior Services, and to NewTV's Stephen Kessinger for their help.

