

Mayor's Update

COVID-19 Updates and Losses

We had 131 new positive COVID-19 cases among Newtonians over the past six days from Dec. 3 - 9, bringing the total number of confirmed cases in Newton to 1,765.

Over the two-week state tracking period from Nov. 22 – Dec. 5, Newton had 303 new positive tests, an increase yet again from the 259 new positive cases from the previous two-week period from Nov. 15 – Nov. 28. Our incidence rate increased to 23.6 cases per 100,000, up from 20.2 during the previous reporting period. Of all Newton residents who were tested for COVID-19, 1.33% of them tested positive (a.k.a., the positivity rate). This is an increase from 1.09% last week and compares to a statewide positivity rate of 5.25% during the same two-week period.



COVID-19 in Newton

Total Cases
1,765

Total Deaths
157

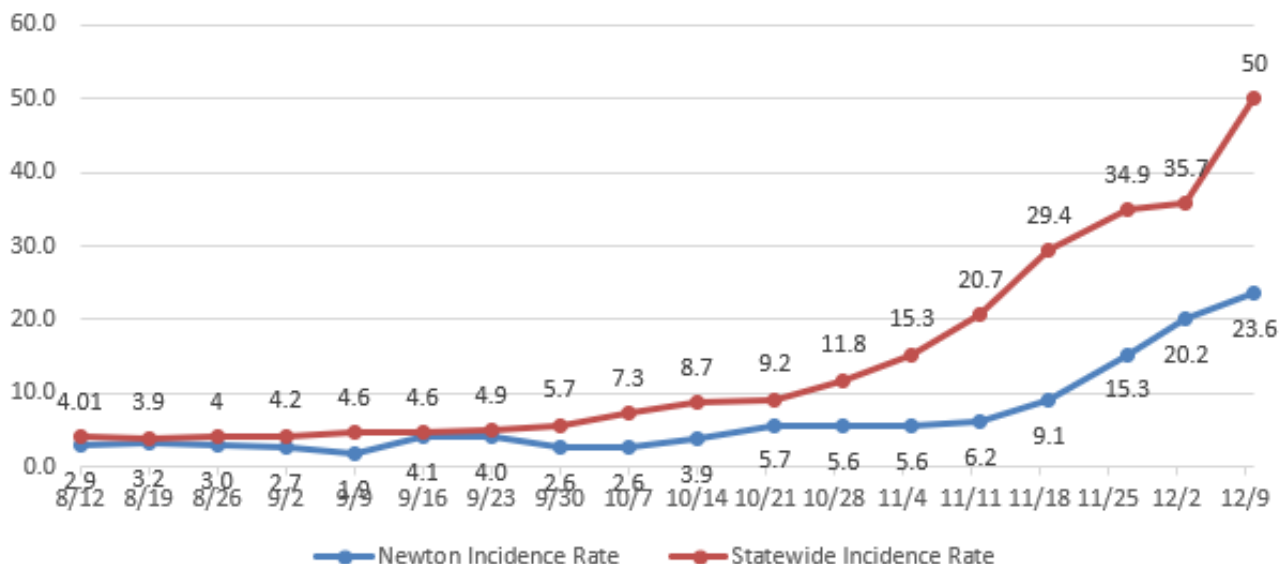
**As of 12/9*

Be careful. More and more people are getting COVID-19. Wear a mask. Clean hands. Stay distant. Go home if not feeling well.

Newton remains 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.) All of our neighbors – Boston, Brookline, Needham, Waltham, Weston and Wellesley – are now designated as yellow after Brookline moved from the green category to yellow this week.

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

Average Daily Incidence Rate per 100,000 people



Three more Newtonians have died with COVID-19. Our grim total is now at 157 Newton residents who we have lost after testing positive for COVID-19. Oh how this suffering and grief, anxiety and loneliness is testing us.

COVID-19 Vaccine

We are encouraged by the recent news that a COVID-19 vaccine is nearing approval for use in the United States. [Gov. Baker announced](#) this week that hospitals will receive the first vaccines to give to front line medical workers. The next doses will be allocated to staff and residents of skilled nursing facilities, rest homes and assisted living residences and first responders. Later, when more vaccine becomes available, the Newton Health and Human Services Department expects to be involved in administering the COVID-19 vaccine to people according to the prioritization identified in the guidance established by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

If you're wondering when you'll be able to receive a vaccine, check the Massachusetts Department of Public Health website [here](#). May I please ask that you do not call our Health and Human Services Department. We have no additional information than that on the MDPH website. Plus, our staff is very, very busy following up on cases, close contacts and other COVID-19 related work, including the preparations for our vaccine clinics whenever the vaccine arrives.

The good news is that we can expect COVID-19 vaccination clinics to be run similarly to our flu vaccine clinics, and our HHS staff is well prepared (and well experienced) for the challenges of administering this new vaccine. I understand that a lot of us are anxious for more information. I will continue to update everyone as the information becomes available.

CDC Updated Mask Guidance

- People age 2 and older should wear masks in all public settings and when around people who don't live in their household, whether inside or outside, and whether close to other people or 6 feet away.
- Masks offer some protection to you and are also meant to protect those around you, in case you are unknowingly infected with the virus that causes COVID-

- 19.
- A mask is NOT a substitute for [social distancing](#). Masks should still be worn in addition to staying at least 6 feet apart.

[Massachusetts' mask order](#) already requires masks in indoor and outdoor public settings; the CDC guidance further recommends masks anytime you're around people who don't live in your household.

Newton Public Schools COVID-19 Data

There is an increase of 23 new positive COVID-19 cases in the Newton Public Schools community since last week, Dec. 3 - 9, bringing the cumulative total to 75 since the start of the school year. Of the total cases, 25 are in-person/hybrid students, 24 are in-person hybrid staff members, 23 are DLA/Remote students and 3 are DLA/Remote staff members.

Most of the new cases were among people not at school during their infectious period, and very few school-based close contacts were identified. This increase in cases within the NPS community is representative of an increase in cases in Newton and statewide. The full dashboard table with data by week is available [here](#).

Struggling with Housing Costs?

The economic fallout from the pandemic is creating tremendous pressures on some of us to pay the rent or mortgage. Here are some ways to find help or, if you rent out your property, to provide help.

Emergency Housing Assistance Extended

I'm so pleased that two nights ago, the Newton Community Preservation Committee (CPC) agreed to extend the City's COVID-19 Emergency Housing Relief Program for a longer period. This program assists Newton households who continue to face a loss of income due to COVID-19 and are struggling to pay housing costs. The CPC approved our Planning Department's request to extend that assistance from six to eight months for qualified households.

Newton renters who are experiencing a reduced income as a direct result of COVID-19 and earn 80% or less of the Area Median Income (AMI) at the time their application is submitted are encouraged to apply. (For example, a family of four at the 80% AMI level has an annual income of \$96,250.) Households currently receiving rental assistance (e.g. Public Housing tenants, RAFT, Section 8, MRVP or other locally administered support) are also eligible for this program. Newton homeowners are also encouraged to apply provided they meet the same criteria for renters and reside in a deed-restricted affordable home. (The restriction must be recorded with the Registry of Deeds.)

Newton's COVID-19 Emergency Housing Relief Program is administered by Metro West Collaborative Development, on behalf of the City. Contact Robyn at Metro West at 617-923-3505 x5 or robyn@metrowestcd.org to begin the application process.

The details of this program, including program guidelines can also be found on the Planning Department's webpage; click [here](#).

Additional State Resources to Assist Renters and Homeowners

The State developed a COVID-19 Eviction Diversion Initiative as the state's eviction and foreclosure moratorium expired in mid-October. The goal of this \$171 million set of resources is to support tenants and landlords facing the financial challenges caused by the pandemic. More specifically, it aims to keep tenants safely in their homes and to support the ongoing expenses of landlords. Funds are available for rental and mortgage assistance, legal aid, housing counseling, and post-eviction rapid rehousing.

The Rental Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) program, for example, is expanded to increase funding from \$4,000 to \$10,000 per household. Funding will also be expanded for the nine regional Housing Consumer Education Centers (HCECs). The initiative also creates the Community Mediation Pre-Court and Legal Representation Services. It expands HomeBASE (rapid rehousing) and the Strategic Prevention Initiative for residents and families in the process of trying to secure stable housing. Resources are also available through the Emergency Rental and Mortgage Assistance Program (ERMA).

Call 2-1-1 to speak with trained staff or visit mass.gov/CovidHousingHelp for more information.

Asking Newton Landlords to Help

The Commonwealth's eviction moratorium expired on Oct. 17 amid ongoing housing instability and financial hardship across Massachusetts and here in Newton. On Dec. 31, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention temporary federal eviction moratorium will also end, increasing the risk of homelessness for thousands of individuals and families in our region.

To help save Newtonians from losing their apartments, I am asking all residential property owners and managers in Newton to sign and adhere to an important statewide eviction diversion pledge. By doing so, these owners and managers will agree to:

- Abide by and support the current CDC eviction moratorium
- Engage proactively with residents and create payment plans
- Support and accept rental assistance payments
- Promote rent adjustments for Section 8/MRVP families
- Encourage structured & interactive mediation

If you own or manage rental housing in Newton, protect our vulnerable residents. Please join housing owners and managers across the state by pledging to work with tenants who have fallen behind on rent.

Click [here](#) to sign the pledge.

Policing and the Next Police Chief

Work continues both by the Newton Police Reform Task Force and in our search for the next Police Chief. Many thanks to residents who have already filled out the confidential survey on characteristics you think are important for our next leader of the Newton Police Department. Haven't had the 5 minutes to complete it yet? I would be grateful for the help; click [here](#).

Concurrently, the Task Force is also continuing to engage all of us in their process. Join two virtual “Town Hall” meetings in the next few weeks.

The Newton Police Reform Task Force Wants to Hear from You!

<p>The Newton Police Reform Task Force invites you to help plan for our community's future. Two Town Halls are coming up in December. Click here to register.</p>	<p>Where are we now? Wed, Dec. 16, 5:30-7:30pm</p>  <p>The consulting team working to support the Task Force will offer their findings on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOTs). Following that, participants will be invited to add their own insights, ideas, and thoughts on NPD's SWOTs to add to that analysis.</p>	<p>Where do we want to go? Tues, Dec. 22, 5:30-7:30pm</p>  <p>The Task Force has done some work to develop a philosophical framework to guide the reform recommendations. The consulting team will work with participants in this Town Hall to develop some concrete goals for the NPD based on that work and participants' own ideas and hopes for our community.</p>
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Where are We Now? Wednesday, December 16 from 5:30 - 7:30 p.m.

The consulting team, Strategy Matters, that is working with the Task Force will offer their preliminary analysis of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOTs) of policing in Newton. Following that brief presentation, participants may add their own insights, ideas, and thoughts on NPD's SWOTs to add to that analysis.

Where Do We Want to Go? Tuesday, December 22 from 5:30 - 7:30 p.m.

The Task Force is developing a philosophical framework to guide their reform recommendations. The consulting team will work with participants in this Town Hall to develop concrete goals for the NPD based on that work and participants' own ideas and hopes for our community.

To register for the Town Halls and to receive the meeting link, [click here](#). To join the email list for Task Force updates, [click here](#).

Shop Local: Making Pickup and Takeout Easier

Our retailers and restaurants have taken a hard hit because of COVID-19 so I'm continuing to find ways to help them. Starting on Dec. 15, we'll pilot an emergency program to allow businesses to request reserving a parking meter space in front of their business for short-term, 15 minute parking spots to make it easy for us to stop quickly and conveniently for pickup and takeout. Our initial trial will be from Tuesday, Dec. 15, 2020 to Friday, Jan. 15, 2021. (The program will be evaluated and may be extended.) Remember, parking is free at metered spaces right now.



Are you a business and interested? Fill out a request form [here](#) — please, no more than one space per business and the space should be in front of the requesting business. Businesses will need to get the okay in writing from their immediate abutting neighbors. Questions? Contact Newton's Economic Development Director Devra Bailin who is the City's coordinator for this program at dbailin@newtonma.gov or 617-796-1122 (office) and 617-831-0103 (cell).

Warmly,

Ruthanne

P.S. Tuesday night brought hundreds of Newtonians out for some holiday cheer and to support our neighbors in need. Together we donated close to \$2,000 in food gift cards and stuffed a Newton Police cruiser to capacity for the toy drive sponsored by the Village Bank to help youngsters in Newton have a special holiday season. Check out the photo album [here](#) of the lights, music, giant puppets



and community spirit. If you still want to donate, please visit any Village Bank branch, Henry Bear's Park in Newtonville or Just Next Door in Auburndale, or bring a food gift card to the Mayor's office at City Hall.

P.P.S. Join Newton Theatre Company for their streamed rendition of "It's A Wonderful Life!" starring local celebrities. It's on Saturday night, Dec. 19 at 8:00 p.m. For more info and pay-what-you-can tickets, go to newtontheatrecompany.com.

P.P.P.S. Thanks to the hundreds of Newtonians who joined us for our Newton Planning and Development Department's 'Zoning Redesign: Where We Are Now' events last week. Did you miss the meetings? You can view the presentation [here](#) and the slides [here](#). Please tell us how we can better provide information about zoning and hear your concerns and ideas. If you have a few minutes, complete this survey [here](#). Questions? Reach out to Newton's Community Engagement Planner Nevena Pilipovic-Wengler at npilipovicwengler@newtonma.gov.

