

Newton to follow state guidelines starting Dec. 26, 2020

From Mayor Fuller's email update 12/22/20

Gov. Baker today announced steps to reduce activity for a few weeks to slow the spread of COVID-19.

Specifically, Gov. Baker will reduce allowable occupancy at restaurants and bars, stores, gyms, libraries, theaters, offices, places of worship and other venues from 40% to 25% of pre-COVID seating capacity effective Saturday, Dec. 26, through Sunday, Jan. 10. He left open the possibility of extending the restrictions for an additional week depending on a range of data points, including hospital capacity.

The Governor's steps make sense. Concerned about the rise in cases and deaths, I had made the decision last week to rollback some activities in Newton. Newton will now follow the state guidelines starting on Dec. 26.

Today's steps announced by Gov. Baker today include:

- Restaurant seating will be set at 25% of pre-COVID capacity and distancing between tables and other requirements will remain in place.
- Fitness Center and Health Club capacity will be set at 25%.
- Movie theater capacity will be reduced to 25% with no more than 50 people per theater.
- Office spaces will be required to reduce capacity to 25%, but there will continue to be exemptions for offices providing "critical services," such as public safety, public health, and local government services.
- Certain industry sectors such as manufacturing, laboratories and construction will be exempt from the 25% limit.
- K-12 schools continue to be exempted from these capacity limits, but will need to follow Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) health standards and guidelines.
- Indoor event capacity is being reduced to 10 people.
- Outdoor event capacity is being reduced to 25 people.
- Private residences will continue to have the same limits of 10 people indoors and 25 outdoors.

Health and Human Services Secretary Marylou Sudders also announced an important change to protect hospital capacity. Effective Dec. 26, all hospitals in Massachusetts must postpone or cancel all non-essential, inpatient elective procedures unless postponement would lead to a high risk of significant decline for the patient.

We all know how much our small businesses, restaurants and stores, including those right here in Newton, are hurting. We're waiting to hear from Gov. Baker tomorrow about economic relief for these businesses. I am also carefully studying the specifics of the COVID relief package that just passed in Washington to understand exactly what is available to help our Newton residents, businesses and our City and employees.

While we "build a bridge to the vaccine," as Gov. Baker said today, let's shop and get our meals locally, stay home for the holidays, wear a mask, stay physically distanced, wash and sanitize our hands, and don't go out if we're feeling unwell.

This week thousands of healthcare workers in Massachusetts received the vaccine. In the coming months, the vaccine will be available to all of us. We can almost see the end. We just need to hang in there together.