

Thursday, Jan. 7, 2021

Mayor's Update

COVID-19 Updates and Losses

COVID-19 cases are still on the rise in Newton. Over the past three days, from Jan. 3 through today, Jan. 6, we had 108 new positive cases among Newton residents, bringing the City's cumulative total of confirmed cases to 2,487.

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) updated COVID-19 Dashboard no longer color codes communities, but shows much of the same data using an interactive map. Check it out [here](#). The Newton incidence rate (average number of new cases per 100,000 people over the two-week period) is 29.45 during the latest state reporting period (Dec. 20 – Jan. 2), up from 24.3 from the last reporting period (Dec. 6 – 19). Of all the Newton residents who had COVID-19 tests during this reporting period, 3.08% were positive. This positivity rate compares to 2.08% during the last reporting period. The seven day statewide positive rate is 7.83%.



COVID-19 in Newton	
Total Cases	2,487
	<i>*As of 1/6/21</i>
Total Deaths	173
	<i>*As of 1/6/20</i>

Read the MDPH Weekly COVID-19 Public Health Report [here](#).

With these rising numbers comes almost inevitable heartbreak. I report tonight the death of an additional three Newton residents who died with COVID-19. Since April 1, we have lost 173 family members, friends and neighbors to this pandemic.

[#StateWithoutStigMA](#)

The length and loss of this pandemic has been an emotional struggle for many. Alcohol sales have increased and state health officials are seeing a slight increase in the number of overdose deaths. The stress of isolation is tough on all of us, and for those struggling with addiction, the added weight of the pandemic can prove unmanageable.

Last week, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health launched a new phase of the [#StateWithoutStigMA](#) campaign to encourage people to seek much needed treatment. Read more about it [here](#).

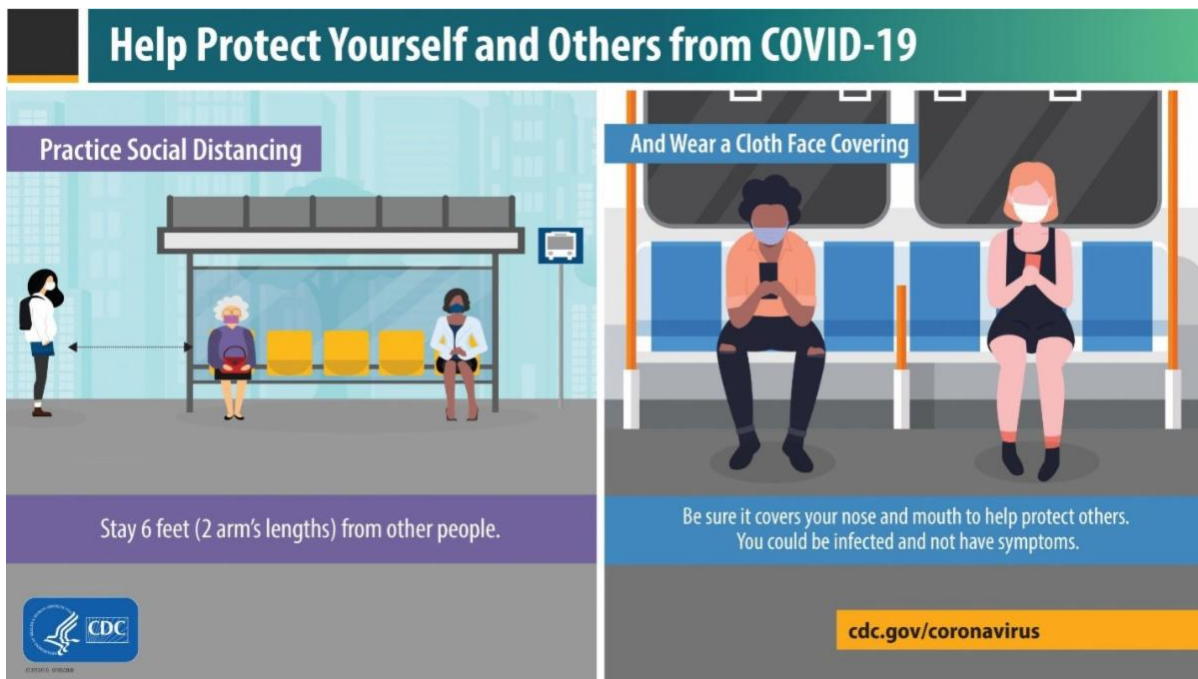
If you or someone you know is struggling with addiction, you are not alone. Find a list of resources available in our area [here](#).

[Vaccines](#)

We're on schedule for Newton's Health and Human Services staff, working with paramedics and EMTs from our ambulance company, to begin vaccinating our first responders next week.

We are following state vaccine roll-out guidelines and the state schedule. I know there are a lot of questions and I'll provide additional information specific to Newton as it becomes available. In the meantime, the best place right now to find answers is the Massachusetts Department of Public Health COVID-19 [website](#), including information about when you or a family member will be eligible for a vaccine (click [here](#)). Want to ask a question? Email inquiries to COVID-19-Vaccine-Plan-MA@mass.gov.

How can we try to stay safe and protect ourselves, our families and our community? – wear masks (making sure it's pulled up over both our nose and mouth), wash/sanitize hands, distance physically and stay home when not feeling well.



NPS Data Dashboard

Our Health and Human Services team is still gathering the data. Updated information will be posted on Newton's COVID-19 website [here](#) tomorrow (Friday, Jan. 8).

New Ambulance Service

You may have noticed new ambulances in Newton over the past week. I recently signed a three-year contract with Fallon Ambulance Service to provide comprehensive Basic Life

Support and Advanced Life Support emergency services for the City, replacing our previous provider Cataldo.

Newton's 911 Dispatch Center, run by our Police Department, serves all fire, police and emergency medical call needs. Annually we have approximately 10,000 calls for ambulance service in the City



We used a request for proposals process and evaluated four companies. We looked carefully for the company that presented the most comprehensive and professional services, personnel and equipment to provide emergency support to the residents of Newton and anyone who works here or is visiting and may have a medical emergency.

The 20 page contract between the City and Fallon details a lot. It includes the required qualifications, training and conduct of Fallon employees as well as required response times, equipment and locations for ambulances and crews.

Another criteria was the ability of the company to provide surge capacity if there are a lot of calls concurrently. Fallon was well positioned to do so as they provide ambulance service currently in Brookline and Dedham as well as serving Newton-Wellesley Hospital and other Boston and metro-Boston hospitals.

Here are some of the specifics:

- Fallon will provide four fully equipped ambulances with Advanced Life Support units dedicated to the City of Newton on duty 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for 52 weeks a year. A fifth ambulance will be available 52 weeks a year for a minimum of 16 hours a day. Back-up units will be provided as needed.
- Each ambulance will be staffed by at least one paramedic and one EMT. A shift commander will also be devoted exclusively to and based in Newton. The Newton Fire Chief or another member of the Department must sign off on all Fallon personnel before they begin working in Newton.
- With ambulances strategically placed across the City, Fallon will work with the Newton Fire Department to monitor all response times and make any adjustments as needed to ensure an ambulance arrives on scene in a timely manner.
- In addition to training requirements, all Fallon EMTs and paramedics assigned to work in Newton are required to be familiar with Newton streets and their layout. They will have to demonstrate their familiarity with Newton to the Fire Chief or another member of the Department before serving on any ambulances

in the City of Newton. (Notably, a large number of Fallon crew members served in Newton with the previous ambulance service provider and know the city well.)

- The City does not pay Fallon to provide ambulance services. Rather, Fallon charges users and health insurance covers certain of these costs. We looked carefully at what Fallon would charge as one of the criteria for choosing the ambulance service.
- Fallon will bill patients any charges that are not covered by insurance. These total charges for an emergency service cannot exceed the rate agreed to in the contract. In addition, Fallon has agreed to review on a case-by-case basis the circumstances of people who are under financial hardship and may consider forgiving part or all of the charges to the patient.
- Three of the dedicated Newton ambulances will be garaged at Fire Stations #2 (Comm Ave & Washington Street), Station #3 (Willow Street in Newton Centre), and Station #4 (Crafts Street). A fourth and back up units will be housed at a location along Route 9 or south of Route 9 in Newton. (Fallon and the Newton Fire Department are actively working on selecting this location.)
- Fallon will provide extra crews and equipment for major planned events (e.g., the Boston Marathon) and larger emergency situations.
- Fallon's contract is for three years, with the ability for the City to extend the contract period for a maximum of two additional one-year terms.
- Fallon will join a monthly Emergency Management Services committee meeting consisting of representatives of Newton Fire, Police, Health & Human Services and Newton-Wellesley Hospital. The team carefully reviews ambulance run reports and calls identified by members of the group as having been a particularly difficult case to further continuous quality improvement.

No 40B "Safe Harbor"

Chapter 40B is a state law enacted in 1969 that allows developers to bypass certain local zoning requirements by including a specific amount of affordable housing units.

Communities qualify for a "safe harbor" from Chapter 40B by meeting affordable housing thresholds in one of two ways. Communities with at least 10 percent of their total housing units considered affordable *or* with at least 1.5 percent of developable land area containing affordable housing qualify as "safe harbors." If a community meets either of the safe harbors, it can enforce local zoning requirements for affordable housing projects proposed under 40B guidelines.

The City's latest calculations show Newton's total housing unit calculation is now at 9.59%, an increase from the 8.3% last year, but still below the 10% threshold. Newton's land area percentage of affordable housing is 1.33%, a slight increase over last year's calculation of 1.27%, but still below the 1.5% threshold.

Read the detailed memo on Newton's current 40B status [here](#).

Tragedy

On Tuesday afternoon, Michael Conlon walked into Indulge candy store on Lincoln Street with a knife. The store's proprietor called 911.

A tragedy then unfolded.

District Attorney Marian Ryan and her team are investigating every aspect of what happened, including the cause and manner of the fatal shots by Newton Police Officers and the actions of the Massachusetts State Troopers. (Read the DAs second update from yesterday [here](#).)

The tragedy leaves us raw.

I will grieve for our lost neighbor. I will care about our officers who are experiencing the aftermath. I will think deeply about this tragedy and what we can do differently and do better, especially for members of our community with mental health issues. Tragedies can be complex, but I hope grief and care can bring us together rather than sow more divisions; divisions are not what will help us do better.

Here at home, we saw divisions cause a tense scene yesterday afternoon – nothing like what we saw in Washington, D.C., but tense nonetheless. A group held a rally at Newton Police Headquarters in West Newton Square to protest the shooting while another group gathered to express support for the police.

Standing between the two groups, maintaining the peace and protecting both sides' right to protest were Newton Police Officers. NPD had meticulously planned for what might unfold. Their training, discipline and emotional intelligence shined through. The officers handled the situation professionally.

Even as we work to improve policing in Newton, yesterday our officers and NPD did us proud.

In Washington D.C., as the constitutional deliberations to certify the votes of the Electoral College got underway, all of us were stunned and horrified when a violent mob stormed into the Capitol. The orderly transfer of power was endangered, civility vanished, lawlessness unfolded, our democracy was attacked, and lives were lost.

Yet, by 4 a.m., we saw that democracy prevailed.

With hope,

Ruthanne



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