

Mayor's Update

The State provided more information about the next phase of the COVID-19 vaccine rollout yesterday.

Plans announced by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) at this time focus the Phase 2 vaccination distribution at high volume, large venue sites including [Fenway Park, Gillette Stadium and more](#).



Given limited vaccine supplies, the State informed us on Sunday that it is not allocating local health departments vaccines for large public clinics. (Newton HHS supplies are capped at 100 doses per week through February.) With the limited doses Newton HHS has been allocated, our HHS staff is focusing in February on people in high-risk congregate housing.

Beginning next Monday, MDPH announced that it is opening vaccine eligibility to adults aged 75 and older, the first priority group in Phase 2. People in this group can start making appointments tomorrow.

The second priority group of Phase 2 eligibility changed and now includes residents 65 years and older as well as people with [2 or more comorbidities \(risk factors\)](#), consistent with guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

What we have come to recognize is that the four priority groups in Phase 2 includes a large number of people and as a result is currently slated to run from February through April. Not everyone even in the first group of age 75 and older will be able to be vaccinated immediately; it's going to take time.

Updated (1.25.21) Phase 2 groups in order of priority:

- Adults that are age 75 and older
- Adults that are age 65 and older *and* individuals with 2+ comorbidities
- Early education and K-12 educators and staff, transit, utility, food and agriculture, sanitation, public works, and public health workers, and then
- Individuals with one comorbidity

As expected, the vaccine will be distributed in many places, including large throughput state sites, pharmacies/grocery stores, doctors' offices, and other locations.

Details on who is eligible and a map of vaccination sites is available at [Mass.gov/COVIDVaccine](#). The map allows people who are eligible to click on a location and make an appointment to be vaccinated. Please note that vaccination sites are added frequently.

I will continue to send frequent updates on vaccines. In addition, Newton's HHS staff is developing a webpage to assist residents with easy access to the latest vaccine distribution information. As soon as it's complete, I will share the link.

Currently the closest mass vaccination site to Newton is at Fenway Park. The site at Gillette Stadium in Foxborough is also open. More are expected to open in other parts of the state next week including at the Reggie Lewis Center in Boston and the Double Tree Hilton Hotel in Danvers.

Three sites in Newton include: (1) one run by the [Holtzman Medical group at the Mt. Ida Campus of UMass Amherst](#), (2) [the CVS at 978 Boylston Street \(Rt. 9 near Upper Falls/Newton Highlands\)](#), and (3) [the Wegmans at 200 Boylston Street \(Rt.9 in Chestnut Hill at Chestnut Hill Square\)](#). A word of caution: Appointments at these Newton sites for people in Phase 2 are not yet available, so check back tomorrow, and probably frequently in the days ahead, as more availability opens up. (This is going to challenge our patience.)

Additional pharmacy and retail locations will be opening in the next few weeks, according to Gov. Baker.

Gov. Baker said yesterday the state is building the capacity to vaccinate the approximately 4 million people who want the vaccine (85% of the population). They are opening sites and putting staff and logistics into place. Massachusetts needs the Federal Government to send larger quantities of the vaccine in the coming weeks and months. Even with the additional vaccine and vaccination clinics, the current plans have vaccinations continuing through June 2021.

The information and plans for vaccination sites has a lot of people in Newton feeling frustrated and more than ready for their turn in line after months of suffering through this pandemic.

I am almost in daily communication with partners across the Commonwealth and decision makers on Beacon Hill, sharing our concerns and working to encourage better systems to serve our residents and employees.

Hungry for more information and an older resident? Newton's public health staff is "zooming" with older residents in Newton on Wednesday, Feb. 3, from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. during a *Vaccine Q & A*. This program (pre-registration required) is a part of the City of Newton's 55+ Parks, Recreation and Culture "Coffee and Conversation" program in partnership with the Newton Senior Center. Our staff will be answering questions about the COVID-19 vaccine in an effort to get clear, accurate information out about the vaccine and distribution. Sign up for the Zoom meeting [here](#).

Newton Senior Services Director Jayne Colino, working with staff and volunteers, is continuing to reach out to older Newton residents who need help navigating the online vaccine system or making a vaccine appointment. If you need help, you can call the Newton Senior Center at (617) 796-1660.

Vaccination is an exceptionally powerful tool in our COVID-19 arsenal. Everyone has other tools available. Medical experts urge all of us – even those already vaccinated – to continue to wear a mask, keep distance from others, frequently clean hands and stay home when having COVID-19 like symptoms. The Governor's travel order still applies to people who have been vaccinated, as does the mask order.

Newton Public Schools Update

Elementary and middle school students have had in-person learning opportunities since September and November respectively and high school students will now have in-person learning as well. Now, all students in the hybrid learning models will be in the school buildings generally two days a week.

The Newton Public Schools are looking forward to reopening fully in September for the 2021-2022 school year. With the vaccine on the horizon, NPS is also exploring providing more in-person learning this spring.

Ventilation

The City's Public Building Commissioner Josh Morse and his team, in partnership with NPS with leadership by David Stickney, undertook a herculean effort. The team completed work on upgrading and improving ventilation systems in all 23 school buildings. The approximately \$2.3 million project, which I authorized to fund through the City's federal CARES Act allocation, will provide excellent ventilation in all our school buildings now, and into the future when our schools are open at full capacity. Check the specific HVAC work at each school building [here](#).

Testing

NPS is continuing with COVID-19 testing for in-person staff even as we decide how best to expand and enhance the testing for staff and students in Newton. NPS will have a specific recommendation to provide a frequent voluntary surveillance testing program for all in-person students, teachers and staff in the next week or two.

The Working Group tasked with recommending the expanded testing approach is analyzing different testing programs, including the ones offered by the state. They're focused on "pool" testing which involves screening a group of people in a "pool" with one test. If a pool tests positive, more testing is done on individuals or in pairs to identify the specific person(s) who is/are infected.

Also, NPS will be increasing our current voluntary testing program for teachers and staff working in-person; currently, tests are provided every two weeks and frequency will increase soon.

Planning for this Spring and September

The Superintendent has convened a District Planning Team to develop the comprehensive plan for a full reopening of the Newton Public Schools in September. The Team will also look at possibilities for expanding in-person learning this Spring.

The group includes NPS staff and administrators, School Committee members, Newton Teachers Association members, PTO chairs, as well as Special Education and English Language Learners' parents, and METCO representatives.

An Ad Hoc Medical Advisory Task Force will work alongside the District Planning Team to advise on health and safety related issues. The medical advisory group consists of:

- Dr. Ashish Jha, Dean, Brown University School of Public Health, NPS parent
 - Dr. Sandra Nelson, Infectious Disease Specialist, Mass General Hospital
 - Dr. Eric Rubin, Professor and Chair, Department of Immunology and Infectious Diseases, Harvard Chan School of Public Health
 - Dr. Brenda Anders Pring, Pediatrician, HHS Advisory Board, NPS parent
 - Dr. Karen Sadler, Pediatrician, NPS School Physician
 - Dr. Dori Zaleznik, Infectious Disease Specialist, former City of Newton Chief Administrative Officer, HHS Commissioner and School Committee member
-

Police Chief Search

I have partnered with the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) to assist me in the search for the next Chief of Police of the Newton Police Department.

As part of this process, both the IACP and I wanted to understand and incorporate input from the Newton community to help me identify what our community needs in our next Police Chief. Therefore, the IACP conducted interviews with members of our community and provided a community survey. This input helped us develop a candidate profile which has circulated within the Newton Police Department, throughout the Commonwealth, and across the country.

Watch the video below to see a summary of the candidate profile or click [here](#) to read it.



We continue to seek additional feedback. Your input will help us as we conduct our interviews and assess our candidates. If you would like to provide open feedback after viewing the video, please click [here](#) to access the online survey. Feedback may be submitted through Friday, Feb. 5.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

P.S. With a dose of “cautious optimism,” the Boston Athletic Association announced today that the 125th Boston Marathon, postponed twice, will be run on Monday, Oct. 11, 2021. Let’s all keep our fingers crossed that road races will again be possible by that date, and we’ll gather together along Comm Avenue to cheer the athletes on Heartbreak Hill.

P.P.S. Help Green Newton’s Environmental Youth Leaders both demonstrate our City’s resilience through these difficult times and honor those we have lost to COVID-19 through the planting of new trees. The 4C (Capture Carbon Commemorate COVID-19) Tree Project is raising money, and will work with

the City of Newton Department of Forestry and community volunteers to begin the first round of planting this spring. Trees need to be purchased soon, so the fundraising deadline is at the end of this week, Friday, Jan. 29. Learn more at [GreenNewton](#).

