

Mayor's Update

COVID-19 Updates and Losses

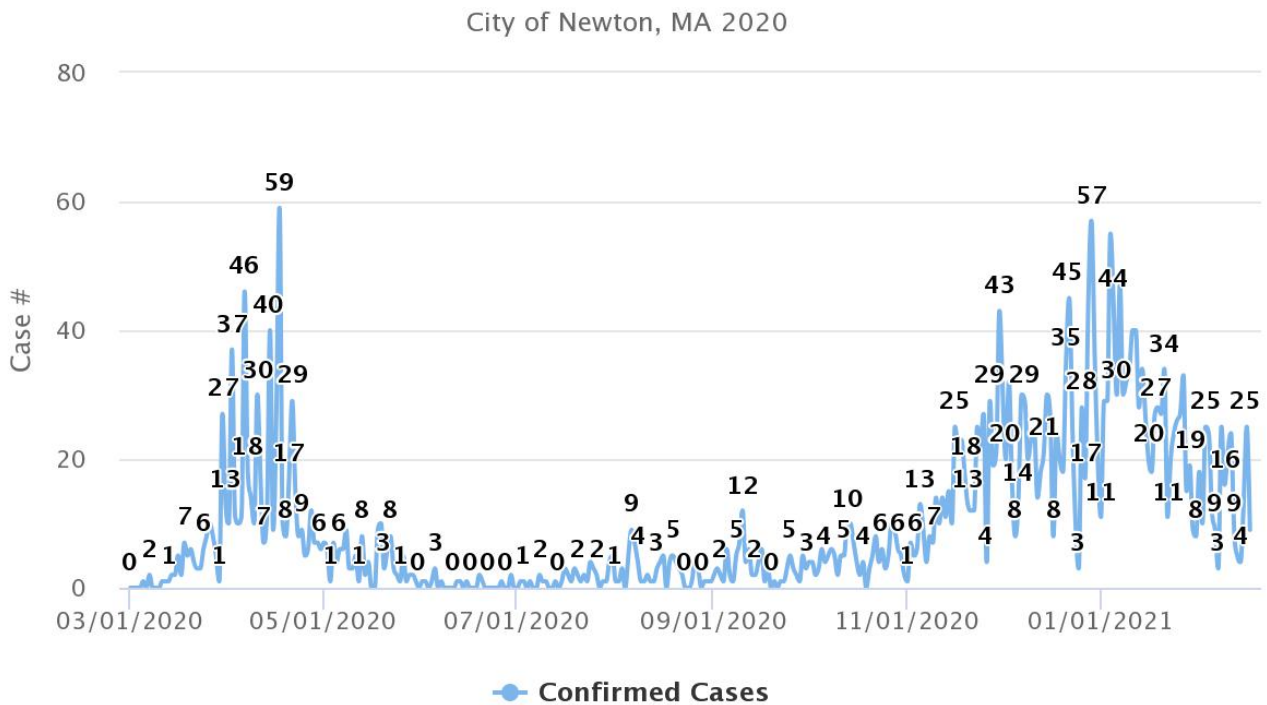
Newton Cases

We had 112 new confirmed cases of COVID-19 over the past seven days from Feb. 11 – 17, a slight increase from the 104 new cases diagnosed among Newton residents last week. These additional cases bring Newton’s cumulative total to 3,444 people.



Over the two week tracking period from Jan. 31 – Feb. 13 used by the State for its reporting, Newton had 208 positive cases, compared to 261 during the previous two weeks, and 387 during the two weeks prior to that.

Newton COVID-19 Cases



Graph data through 2/17/2021

Our incidence rate in Newton decreased again to 16.3 cases per 100,000, down from 20.3 reported over the previous two weeks and 25.1 during the two weeks prior to that. (As a reminder, the incidence rate is the average daily number of new COVID cases per 100,000 people for the 14 day period. It’s useful for comparing the amount of COVID across cities and towns that have different population levels and helps us understand how many new COVID infections are occurring among our residents.)

COVID-19 in Newton

Total Cases

3,444

Total Deaths

200

*As of 2/18/21

Newton's positivity rate is also again under 1% and trending in the right direction. Of the 33,275 tests administered to Newton residents over the past two week reporting period, 0.74% came back positive. It was 0.84% during the previous two weeks, and 1.22% prior to that. The statewide positivity rate is now 2.70% (with 1.26 million tests performed in Massachusetts during the current two-week reporting period.)

Find more statewide information on the Massachusetts Department of Public Health data dashboard [here](#).

Boston College Cases

While the number of new cases in Newton are moving in the right direction, we're continuing to see a concerning number of cases at Boston College. Over the two week period from Jan. 31 to Feb. 13, members of the BC community, who live in Newton on or off campus, accounted for approximately 36% of Newton's total number of cases, or 76 of our 208 cases (BC community members living in dorms on the Boston side of their campus or in off-campus apartments outside Newton are not counted in Newton's data. FYI: From Feb. 1 to Feb. 14, BC had a total of 143 positive cases of which it appears a little more than half live in Newton.)

The Boston College website shows 73 additional cases reported starting on Monday, Feb. 15. The 73 positives include those in the BC community living both in and outside of Newton. Boston College reports its case data [here](#).

We are continuing to urge Boston College officials that their students strictly adhere to public health guidelines and to urge the state to strengthen the oversight.

Losses

This week we feel the tragic consequence from the spread of the virus. Six more of our neighbors died with COVID-19, bringing the total number of people in Newton who have lost their lives with COVID-19 to 200. It's a breathtaking and mind-numbing number of people lost in less than a year.

Variants

Massachusetts has identified one case of the B.1.351 variant of COVID-19 that was originally identified in South Africa and that person resides here in Middlesex County. The State has also identified 34 cases of B.1.1.7 variant originally found in the United Kingdom.

The best defense against COVID and its various variants is to stop the spread.

New information from CDC shows that improving our masks can help a lot. One technique is using a mask with multiple layers or wearing two masks. Another useful technique is making sure your mask fits snugly against your face. You can improve the fit of a mask by using one with a nose wire, using a mask "fitter" (i.e., a brace made out of wire that goes outside of your mask and helps it fit snugly around your nose, cheeks and chin), or knotting the ear loops to make the mask fit tighter.

Learn more about how to use masks to protect yourself and others [here](#).

Other critical and effective public health measures to help prevent the spread of COVID include physical distancing, avoiding groups, staying home when sick, getting tested if you have symptoms or are identified as a close contact of someone with COVID, and getting vaccinated when it is your turn.

Learn more about variants at [New Variants of the Virus that Causes COVID-19 | CDC](#) and track their presence in both Massachusetts and the US at [US COVID-19 Cases Caused by Variants | CDC](#).

Newton Public School Data

There is no new data to report this week because of school vacation. We will update the numbers again next week.

Vaccinations

Today, the Commonwealth opened vaccine eligibility to three additional groups, totaling about one million more people:

- People age 65 to 74
- People with two or more specific medical conditions (Click [here](#) for more information on the eligible medical conditions).
- People who live and work in low-income and affordable senior housing

Everyone who was previously eligible for the vaccine also continues to be able to make vaccine appointments.

While the number of people eligible for vaccines is increasing, vaccine supplies remain limited. While the State said they expect to begin getting 139,000 first doses starting next week, a 25% increase, that's a lot less than the additional 1 million people that just became eligible to book appointments. The Governor indicated that it will likely take a month or more before for all people in these eligible categories can make an appointment for their first dose. That seems optimistic.

We echo Gov. Baker's message, one we've had to hear often during this pandemic, try to be patient. It was difficult to be patient this morning when the Massachusetts vaccination site, [vaxfinder.mass.gov](#), got overwhelmed and crashed. Frustration mounted once it was able to be intermittently accessed as the available appointments at four mass vaccination sites in Springfield, Danvers, Natick and Dartmouth were fully booked before noon.

The State also announced this week that they have decided to streamline vaccination efforts and that they will be prioritizing vaccine supplies to the large throughput sites such as Fenway Park, the Natick Mall and Gillette Stadium.

As such, the state has decided *not* to provide vaccines to the vast majority of local health departments, including Newton. The state made an exception for a small number of communities, twenty in all, that are designated as having the highest social vulnerability and facing a disproportionate impact from COVID-19.

This means that the Newton Health & Human Services Department will not receive vaccine supplies for public clinics.

As Mayor, I regret that our staff will not be able to provide public clinics here. Please know that we indicated to the State that the staff in our Health & Human Services Department was both willing and well prepared to provide Newton-based public clinics. I continue to advocate with the Governor for our ability to vaccinate members of our community as well as our teachers, public works employees and other essential workers in Newton as they become eligible to receive the vaccine. I understand the State's decision is based on the health of everyone in the Commonwealth and creating the most efficient ways to get the greatest number of vaccine doses out as quickly as possible.

Check eligibility and get more information about vaccines at [Mass.gov](https://www.mass.gov) and make an appointment [here](#).

For Newton residents eligible to be vaccinated who are struggling to navigate the state's vaccination appointment system and don't have computer access or a friend or family member who can help make an appointment, please call us at 617-796-1666. Leave a message with your name/phone number for a return phone call and the folks at our Senior Center will help

The City is pleased to continue partnering with the Holtzman Medical Group who is administering vaccines on the UMass Amherst – Mt. Ida Clinic in Newton. Newton's Department of Senior Services is assisting our most vulnerable older residents in booking appointments there.

Potholes Galore: Be Our Eyes

Snow, sleet and rain combined with roller-coaster temperature swings (i.e., New England weather) is the perfect recipe for potholes – and we're seeing a lot of them. As asphalt ages and loses its flexibility, water seeps into it and under it. When the water freezes, it expands and thus bends, cracks and weakens the pavement. Then, when the ice melts, the pavement contracts and leaves gaps and voids under the pavement. The freezing and thawing happens over and over in the winter, weakening and cracking the pavement more and more. Then the weight of the cars and trucks over that weakened spot causes the road material to be displaced or broken up. Voila- a pothole.

Newton's DPW crews have repaired more than 523 potholes since the first of the year, and two to three crews are working every day as weather permits to repair more. Already, we've used more than 90 tons of asphalt on the repairs this season.



The work clearly isn't done. May we ask for your help? Please be our eyes out on the roads. When you see a pothole, report it through our 311 system so we can get it fixed. If we know about the pothole, we will fix it.

The fastest way to make a report (which can be done anonymously) is to download the Newton MA 311 app on your smart phone. With the app, you can take a photo of the pothole and send in a report right at the spot. (Open the app, hit "report a problem," then hit "streets," take a photo and follow the prompts.) Don't have a smart phone? Newton's 311 system can also be accessed on your computer through the

City's website [here](#), or by calling 311 on your phone. Please provide a very specific location/address so our crews can find the pothole.

Although potholes are inevitable in this climate, the problem will be less severe as we continue to repair our roads. Across the City, we've already repaved 47 miles of roadway (of our 300 total miles) over the past three years and we'll continue this necessary work.



(Public Building Commissioner Josh Morse and I yesterday toured the terrific addition to Oak Hill Middle School and its three additional classrooms. The work is on track (and on budget) and will be ready for students at the start of the school year this fall.)

Share Your Judy Dore Story

Judy Dore has been the heart and soul of the Newton Farmers' Market since the first summer it began in 1980.

During that summer of 1980, Judy was working part time as a sports manager in Newton's Parks and Recreation Department. The Department had just won a grant to start a Farmers' Market, and the director at the time, Fran Towle, asked Judy to go with her to check out the setup. As the pair arrived, the person hired as Newton's market manager quit on the spot. Fran turned to Judy, offered her the job, and the rest, as they say, is history.



Judy helped the Newton Farmers' Market become not only one of the first, but also one of the most successful in the state. Over the past forty years, she's mentored market managers and embraced vendors as her extended family (including her first vendor, Wally's Vegetables, who still participates).

This past summer, COVID-19 made gathering together fraught. Judy responded by reinventing Newton's Farmers' Market. She studied the health guidelines. She found a temporary new location that allowed for physical distancing. She worked with her vendors on new protocols. The 40th summer, Judy's last as market manager, was a triumph.

Judy is retiring, and her last day working for the City of Newton is next Friday, Feb. 26. Join me in thanking Judy for her 40 years managing the Newton Farmers' Market and wishing her well as she begins a new chapter. I suspect we'll still see and hear a lot of our friend and neighbor.

Do you have a special memory about Judy? We're compiling a memory book. Send a note to Nancy Scammon in the Parks, Recreation and Culture Department at nscammon@newtonma.gov or give her a call at 617-796-1506 and we'll include yours.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

P.S. Learn more about mental health and mental illness at a free webinar on Tuesday, March 2, 6:30 – 8:00 p.m. We'll start the conversation on improving education and awareness on mental health issues here in Newton with staff from the National Alliance on Mental Health Newton – Wellesley and Riverside Emergency Services. Join the webinar at newtonma.gov/mentalhealth.



P.P.S. Are you an independent Newton restaurant looking for more business while providing help? The Newton-Needham Chamber and the Rotary Club of Newton are accepting applications [here](#) for a new program launching next month that provides \$75,000 to Newton restaurants to make meals for those facing food insecurity. The meals will be distributed to our food pantries, senior and family programs, and other people in need here in Newton. State Sen. Cindy Creem earmarked the funding in the state budget and it's a wonderful example of the private, public and non-profit sectors working together to help keep employees working in our restaurants and put food on the table for people challenged by the pandemic.

P.P.P.S. Interested in learning more about the five candidates running for the two vacant City Council seats in our March 16 special election? (These are "at large" Council seats so all of us can vote in this special election.) Thanks to Newton's Area Councils— Newtonville, Newton Highlands, Upper Falls and Waban— you can Zoom into a virtual debate this Sunday, Feb. 21, from 2:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. Register in advance for the debate [here](#). Want to vote by mail in the special election? Get the application [here](#).

