

Mayor's Update

COVID-19 Updates and Losses

Newton Cases

We had 75 new confirmed cases of COVID-19 over the past seven days from March 4 – 10, an increase of four from the 71 reported during the previous week. These cases bring the cumulative total number of people in Newton who have tested positive since we reported our first cases last March 15, 2020 to 3,691.

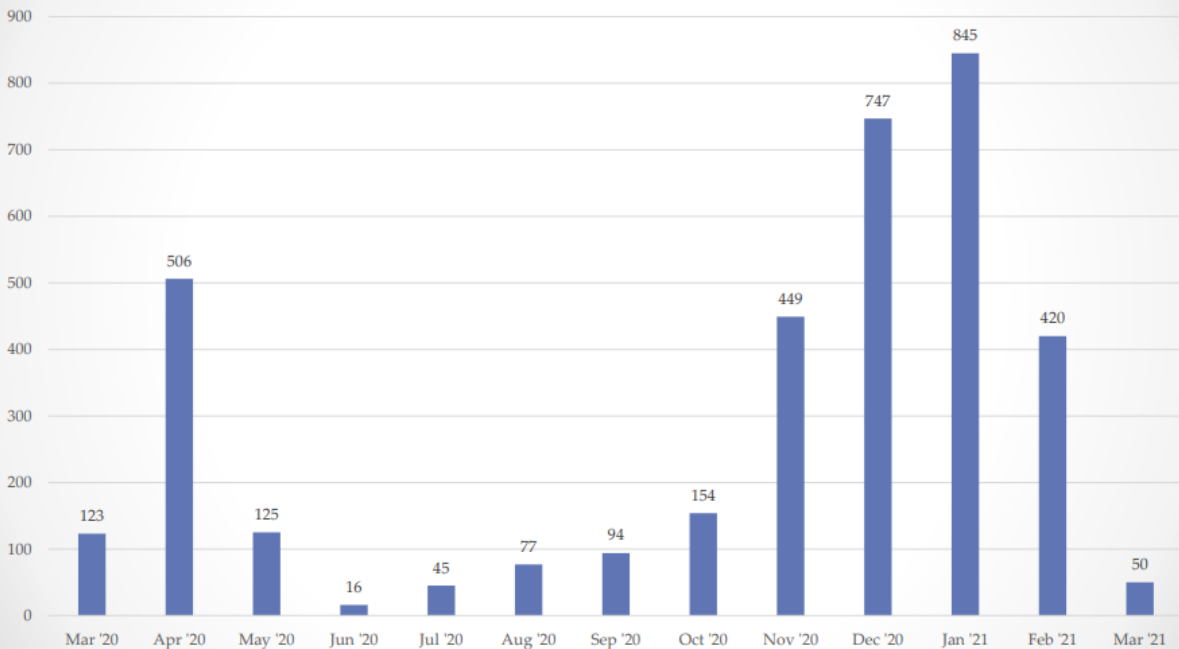
(On that date a year ago, I reported that Newton Health and Human Services was monitoring five people, the first who had tested positive in our city.)



The data, thankfully, continues to show that we're heading in the right direction. Over the two-week tracking period used by the State from Feb. 21 – March 6, Newton had 169 cases, compared to 214 during the previous two weeks.

The chart below gives a good picture of how dramatic the surge in cases was during the holidays and the dramatic decrease in February. Please note the 50 cases shown in March are only through March 6.

Confirmed Cases by Month*



*Cases by test date. Counts by month may change as new information is obtained about city/town or residents or cases are de-duplicated. Does not include months where case count is less than 5 or months not yet complete.

COVID-19 in Newton

Total Cases
3,691

Total Deaths
208

*As of 3/10/21

Our incidence rate in Newton is also encouraging. At 13.0 cases per 100,000 this week, it's down from 16.7 over the past reporting period.

Newton's positivity rate also continues to fall, with 0.54% of the 35,142 tests administered to Newton residents over the past two-week reporting period coming back positive. This is a decrease from the 0.64% rate reported during the previous reporting period. The statewide positivity rate is now 1.83% (with 1.25 million tests performed in Massachusetts during the current two-week reporting period.)

The Boston College community this week accounted for 19% of the cases in Newton over the past two-week reporting period, again showing welcome improvement over the past several weeks. Boston College posts its COVID-19 case data [here](#).

Losses

While we are seeing progress in fewer new cases and more people vaccinated, the depressing parade of loss continues. This week we mourn five more Newtonians who died with COVID-19, bringing our total number of residents lost to 208.

The loss of five more of us is a powerful reminder that this virus is not gone. Help save lives and avoid spreading the virus by continuing to wear masks, stay physically distanced, wash hands and stay home if you're not feeling well. Hang in there.

Newton Public School Data

We have 8 people in the Newton Public Schools who tested positive for COVID-19 during the seven day period of March 4 – 10, bringing the cumulative total to 296. This includes 5 students learning in person and 3 staff members working in person. The Newton dashboard with week by week data is available [here](#).

Vaccines

Preliminary analysis of Newton's vaccination data shows approximately 36% of adult Newton residents have received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine through March 6.

Broadly, this rate is distinctly higher than the average for Middlesex County (17.2% through March 4), though due to timing and different groups of people included depending on the report, this isn't a perfect comparison.

As is often the case with data, there are some important caveats to the percentage reported above about the proportion of Newton adults who have received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine.

Making "apples to apples" comparisons to county or statewide immunization rates is imperfect because data is pulled at different times, includes slightly varying populations (all adults vs. all people) and, in the case of our Newton number, includes some Boston and Brookline residents who live in the 02467 zip code. The

Newton vaccination report can only be run by zip code. Some zip codes are exclusively within Newton. However, we're not able to parse out residents from the 02467 zip code that might live in Boston or Brookline so Newton's overall number is slightly, though probably not substantially, inflated.

Find a vaccination site [here](#).

I'm looking forward to getting my vaccine when it's my turn.

CDC Guidelines for the Fully Vaccinated

CDC has updated information and advice for people who are fully vaccinated. Fully vaccinated means at least 14 days since a 2nd dose of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine, or at least 14 days since a single dose of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

Those who are fully vaccinated can start to do some things they had stopped doing because of the pandemic. One activity includes small groups of vaccinated people gathering indoors without a mask. Another includes small gatherings indoors with unvaccinated people from one other household without masks, but only if any of those people or anyone they live with does not have an increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19.

Are you fully vaccinated? If so, read the [guidance](#) carefully.

What hasn't changed is that if you have symptoms of COVID-19, regardless of your vaccination status, you should isolate from others and get tested for COVID-19. No vaccine is 100 percent effective.

We're still learning how vaccines will affect the spread of COVID-19. After you've been fully vaccinated against COVID-19, you should keep taking [precautions](#) in public places such as wearing a mask, staying apart from others, and avoiding crowds and poorly ventilated spaces until we know more.

Travel Order Updates

Massachusetts has also updated its travel order to reflect changes for people who are vaccinated, and its list of places designated as lower-risk. If you're fully vaccinated and at least 14 days past your 2nd dose for Moderna or Pfizer or 14 days past your single Johnson & Johnson vaccination, you qualify for an exemption to the travel order and do not have to quarantine.

Massachusetts residents are still urged to limit any out-of-State travel only to States or Territories designated as COVID-19 lower-risk places. As of March 11, these lower-risk places are Hawaii, Oregon, Washington, Missouri and Puerto Rico. [Check here](#) for updates as this information can change frequently.

Policing in Newton

Last June 15, 2020, I spoke to Newtonians in the wake of the killing of George Floyd. I talked about how his death had brought to the surface the pain of generations of people of color suffering racism and bias, and unequal access to housing, jobs, education and health care opportunities.

I reminded everyone that systemic racism and unconscious bias surrounds us in Newton.

I called for all of us to forge a better Newton by eliminating racial disparities and building a more equitable Newton. I asked for help in healing racial divisions. I challenged each of us to dismantle our own privately held biases. I committed to working to ensure Newton is truly an inclusive, welcoming community where people of all racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds can live and thrive, be safe and secure, and feel welcome and be supported.

That same night, I announced the formation of an independent Newton Police Reform Task Force. I wanted a group of our residents to look closely at policing in Newton and give me their feedback. I asked that they consider a wide range of policies and practices, from recruiting, hiring, training and promoting to services provided, misconduct and discipline, and accountability and oversight.

Last Friday, I received the final report and recommendations from the Newton Police Reform Task Force. This report is now posted on our website. Click [here](#). (Alternatively, on newtonma.gov, go to the Mayor Fuller homepage, click on Special Projects and Initiatives, and scroll to the Newton Police Reform Task Force.)

Our goal in Newton is to provide fair, just, respectful, safe and effective policing for our City. Our officers are dedicated to this mission and committed to continuously improving and learning from best practices. I have great respect and deep gratitude for the Newton Police for their professionalism and commitment. They have a demanding, critically important, and sometimes dangerous role.

I am reading the Newton Police Reform Task Force report thoroughly and thinking seriously about the recommendations. I am grateful to the members of the Newton Police Reform Task Force for the many hours they invested, their inclusive approach and their hard work. I want to thank Chair Sonja Spears, in particular, for her effective and caring leadership over the course of the past seven months. She did an admirable job during a challenging period both leading the Task Force and shaping the final recommendations contained in the group's report.

While the Newton Police Reform Task Force did their work, an internal group of Newton Police Department sworn officers and civilians undertook their own assessment. I met with them recently and I am grateful for their thoughtful insights and recommendations for improving a department for which they care so deeply.

Thank you, too, to the City Councilors, residents, businesspeople, City and School staff, and many groups (ranging from the Newton Coalition of Black Residents, Families Organizing for Racial Justice (FORJ) and Defund NPD) who have shared their experiences and ideas with me.

I also want to thank Interim Chief Howard Mintz and NPD Executive Officer George McMains. They have brought their years of experience, wisdom, judgment and love for the profession of policing, this Department, and our NPD employees to this important work.

I will be coming forward in the coming weeks with my vision and our plans for the Newton Police Department.

Even before we come forward with these future plans for the Department, we are

taking several concrete steps, right now, to move forward. For example, we are starting a number of initiatives to strengthen our response to crises.

- We have created a Community Crisis Intervention Team (CCIT). Its primary objective is promoting communication and enhancing and improving the response of the City of Newton and private agencies when summoned to intervene with individuals who are mentally ill, developmentally disabled, struggling with substance use or experiencing trauma in their lives. This team will support Newton residents and their families. Our Community Crisis Intervention Team is co-led by staff from the Newton Police Department and Newton Health and Human Services, with partners from the Newton Fire Department, Newton Public Schools, the Newton Department of Senior Services, Fallon Ambulance, Advocates Newton Wellesley, Newton-Wellesley Hospital, the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health, the Newton Housing Authority, and a local mental health agency, Riverside Community Care. They are beginning this week with monthly meetings.
- Staff from the Newton Police Department and Newton Health and Human Services are working with Judge Heffernan and the Newton District Court and knowledgeable residents (kudos to Rick Dinjian) to stand up a Mental Health Court. This collaborative will help people with mental illness navigate their way through the court system by partnering them with a case clinician to help them get specific treatment, medication, and preventative services. This alternative to the traditional court system connects defendants with rehabilitative services and support networks, thereby diverting them from incarceration, reducing recidivism, increasing public safety, and improving individuals' quality of life.
- Newton Police Officers will have access to Crisis Intervention Training, including de-escalation classes with the Norfolk County Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Training & Technical Assistance Center. The CIT Training is a 40 hour course in which officers are equipped with the knowledge and skills to guide best practice response to individuals impacted by psychiatric illness, developmental disorders, and co-occurring substance use disorders. Officers will also participate in another set of simulation trainings to provide real life opportunities to practice de-escalation and best practices on use of force.

Perhaps the most important part of the process of moving forward is the hiring of a new Chief of Police. Interviews began last week by the Police Chief Selection Committee. I expect to announce who the next leader will be in early April. Here are a few of the qualities that I am looking for:

- An adaptive leader committed to continuous improvement
- A person who will hold herself/himself/themselves and others to the values of integrity, transparency, proactivity, innovation, equity, accountability, compassion, excellence and responsiveness
- A relentless commitment to training and professional standards, with an emphasis on implicit bias training, procedural justice, restorative justice, de-escalation pertaining to use of force options, and police legitimacy

As the new Chief takes leadership of the department, we will keep a close eye on important reforms coming from the State. In addition to a Commission on Civil Service and another on Qualified Immunity, a Massachusetts Peace Officers

Standards and Training Commission (POST) is being created. It will put in place processes to increase transparency, accountability and follow-up on officer complaints.

I look forward to finishing my review of the recommendations of the Newton Police Reform Task Force and coming forward with a broad group of plans, policies and practices as NPD continues their work of ensuring fair, just, respectful, safe and effective policing.

As I think about our future plans, I know that virtually all the proposed changes will take a partnership with the Newton Police unions. I look forward to working with them. I know that some changes will take time, others are likely to require a financial investment, and we have a strong department filled with people committed to continuous improvement and focused on working with our community.

I look forward to sharing a more comprehensive vision for the Newton Police Department in the coming weeks and working with the new Chief on specific goals, objectives and action plans.

Mental Health Resources

Newton's Health and Human Services Director of Social Services Meghan Kennedy was pleased to host a webinar with NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) Newton Wellesley and Riverside Emergency Services to share important information and resources related to mental health in our community.

Mental health is a critical issue. One in 5 adults experience mental illness (including major depression, anxiety disorder, and bipolar disorder). As many as 1 in 6 children between the ages of 6 and 17 has a treatable mental health disorder such as depression, anxiety, or attention deficit / hyperactivity disorder. While these numbers are daunting, we have community resources in Newton and a shared goal of understanding and compassion.

Our webinar offered strategies everyone can use to help de-escalate an encounter with someone who is having a hard time. Keeping a calm voice, listening, giving space, and offering options vs. taking control are a few strategies that you will find on the presentation linked [here](#).

Newton's Health and Human Services (HHS) social work staff can help residents access mental health resources. HHS also has resources on substance use, domestic violence programs, food insecurity, and financial assistance for income eligible residents. For this information and more, please feel free to visit Newton's Social Services home page [here](#).

We are partnering with Samaritans and Families for Depression Awareness for our next webinar on suicide prevention and helping families recognize and cope with depression and bipolar disorder. [Please register here](#) for the Thursday, May 6 at 6:30 p.m. program. In addition, Newton's Social Services occasionally send mental health related updates and details on webinar programs to the community via a newsletter list. If you're interested in subscribing, click [here](#) and choose the list called "Health-Mental Health/Substance Use Prevention."

Meet Newton's Energy Coach

We created a brand new position here in the City of Newton, a first not just for us but (we think) for any municipality. To attain the urgent goal of having Newton be carbon-neutral by 2050, we have to make a lot of changes right now. Our buildings (residential and commercial/industrial) account for approximately 64% of Newton's greenhouse gas emissions. But energy efficiency, weatherization and using renewable energy can be complicated and the technology is changing rapidly. Hence, we wanted to have an Energy Coach help all of us make environmentally thoughtful decisions.



Please welcome Liora Silkes, the City of Newton's Energy Coach, and start taking advantage of her deep expertise. Liora comes to this position from the Mass Save energy efficiency incentives program. She understands both green energy and how to go green economically.

Liora is working with the City's Sustainability team to assist residents, builders, and contractors reduce greenhouse gas emissions with techniques such as insulating and electrifying homes. Join Liora virtually on Tuesday, March 30 at 7:00 p.m. as we *Spring into Climate Change*. Click [here](#) to register.

Do you have questions about how to get started on or go further with home energy upgrades such as insulation, electric heat pump heating and cooling, or solar panels? She also knows a lot about electric vehicles. Please reach out to Liora at lsilkes@newtonma.gov.

Green Line Work Resumes Next Week

With warmer temperatures arriving, the MBTA will resume work next week on the \$101 million track and signal replacement project to modernize and improve service along the Green Line.

MBTA contractors are scheduled to resume major construction work this coming Monday, March 15 at Newton Centre and Newton Highlands. Crews will work overnight on weeknights from 8:30 p.m. to 5:00 a.m., and around the clock on weekends at these locations throughout March and April.

Crews will also replace track in Waban over the weekend of March 20– 21. Signal infrastructure and replacement work will occur at multiple locations between Riverside and Reservoir on weeknights and weekends.

Work on the tracks includes replacing rail, railroad ties, and ballast.

The MBTA has promised to keep residents who live close to the construction informed. I'll keep holding



them to that.

As we know from the past two years, this work is noisy. The work is the loudest when crews cut the rails with a saw or torch and tamp the track to the proper elevation. The MBTA has pledged to us that crews will work as efficiently as possible and use techniques to reduce the noise as much as possible.

Please bear with the MBTA – the project, which started in the June of 2018, is 75% complete and is scheduled to be finished this fall. Once completed, service will be faster and more reliable. In the meantime, residents nearby may need earplugs.

The MBTA has a noise complaint hotline at 508-676-3550.

To do this work, the MBTA needs to shut down service on most weeknights and weekends. Shuttle buses will replace train service during these times.

Want more information about the project? Visit [mbta.com/GreenLineD](https://www.mbta.com/GreenLineD). Sign up for weekly updates about the project [here](#).

A Long Year

One year ago on March 10, Gov. Baker declared a State of Emergency in Massachusetts.

One year ago today, I convened all our Department Heads for a meeting at our Emergency Operations Center to begin pandemic operations. We haven't gathered together in person as a group since.

One year ago tonight, the National Basketball Association stopped play and actor Tom Hanks announced he and his wife tested positive for the novel coronavirus.

One year ago this week, people in Newton were first diagnosed with COVID-19.

One year ago this week, the Newton Public Schools closed its doors for in-person learning.

For all of us, this has been a tremendously long, difficult year– Isolation... Anxiety... Topsy-turvy schooling... Lost jobs... Housing and food insecurity... Missed milestones... A dearth of hugs and handshakes, music and plays, suppers and fiestas.

On this summerlike day, I look forward to better days, healing rifts, and coming together for joyful, communal, in-person, neighborly life.

Warmly,

P.S. Voters have returned approximately 5,800 mail-in ballots and 1,181 people have already cast early ballots in person here at City Hall. Polls open for next Tuesday's Special Election to fill two vacant City Council seats. Tomorrow is the last day to vote early in person, and polls are open on Tuesday, March 16 from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Click [here](#) for more election information.



P.P.S. A review of Maureen Walker's new book, *When Getting Along Is Not Enough. Reconstructing Race in Our Lives and Relationship*, highlighted Dr. Walker's ability to help us with the complexity and hard work of cross-race relationships and to offer real-life suggestions on how each of us can step up, grow up, and show up for conversations about race. Join us virtually next Tuesday, March 16 at 7:00 p.m. for an hour-long discussion with Dr. Walker, part of our Overdue: Confronting Race and Racism in Newton series. Register for the event [here](#). (Please note that registration closes two hours before the event.)

P.P.P.S. Curious about Newton's achievements and challenges with Newton's Climate Action Plan? Do you want ideas on how to contribute personally to the City's progress toward using less and greening the rest? Join Newton Citizens Commission on Energy Chair Halina Brown on a virtual program next Thursday, March 18 at 7:00 p.m. Register [here](#).



P.P.P.P.S. Newton Police Community Outreach Officer Justin Lau will be welcoming ideas and fielding questions in our "Conversations with a Cop" on Zoom on St. Patrick's Day, Wednesday, March 17, 5:00 p.m. Register [here](#).

P.P.P.P.P.S. Daylight Savings Time starts this Sunday, (Pi Day!) March 14. Turn your clocks ahead an hour before going to sleep Saturday night.

