

Thursday, April 8, 2021

# Mayor's Update

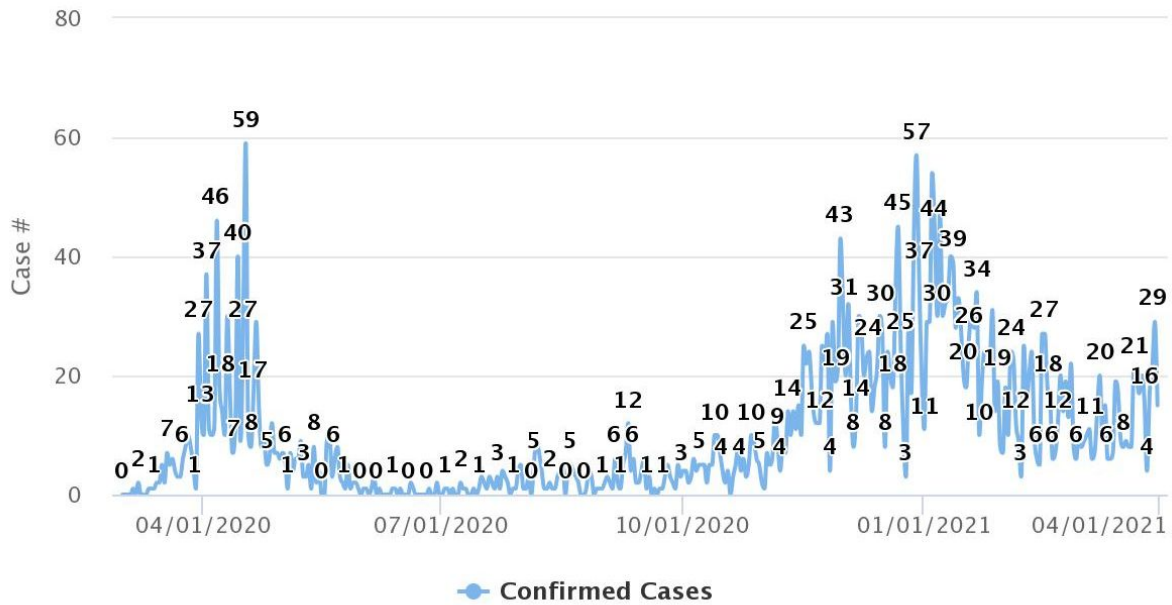


## COVID-19 Updates and Losses

We had 91 additional confirmed cases of COVID-19 over the past seven days from March 31 to April 7, bringing our cumulative total of Newtonians who have tested positive to 4,089. The 91 new cases this week is 47 fewer than the 138 new cases we saw over the previous seven days, and more than the 85 and 75 new cases we saw respectively over the previous weeks.

Over the two-week tracking period used by the State from March 21 – April 3, Newton had 220 new cases compared to 182 during the previous two weeks, and 156 during the reporting period prior to that.

Newton COVID-19 Cases



Graph data through 3/31/2021

Our average daily incidence rate continues to tick up. This week we have 17.1 cases per 100,000, higher than the 14.2 reported last week or the 12.2 reported prior to that (based on the state’s two-week tracking period).

Another indicator we keep track of and report is the positivity rate. This week .75% of all the 32,282 tests administered to Newton residents over the past two-week reporting period came back positive. Last week the percentage was .64%, and the week previous it was .53%.

**COVID-19 in  
Newton**

**Total Cases**  
**4,089**

**Total Deaths**  
**214**

\*As of 4/7/21

The statewide positivity rate is now 2.54%, up from 2.36% last week (with 1.2 million tests performed during this reporting period).

This number includes tests administered to students, faculty and staff on college campuses where numerous tests are done routinely on people without symptoms in an effort to identify cases early. The volume of these tests reduces the positivity rate. According to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, the statewide positivity rate would be 4.1%, significantly higher than the 2.46% reported as of yesterday, if the campus tests were omitted from the calculation.

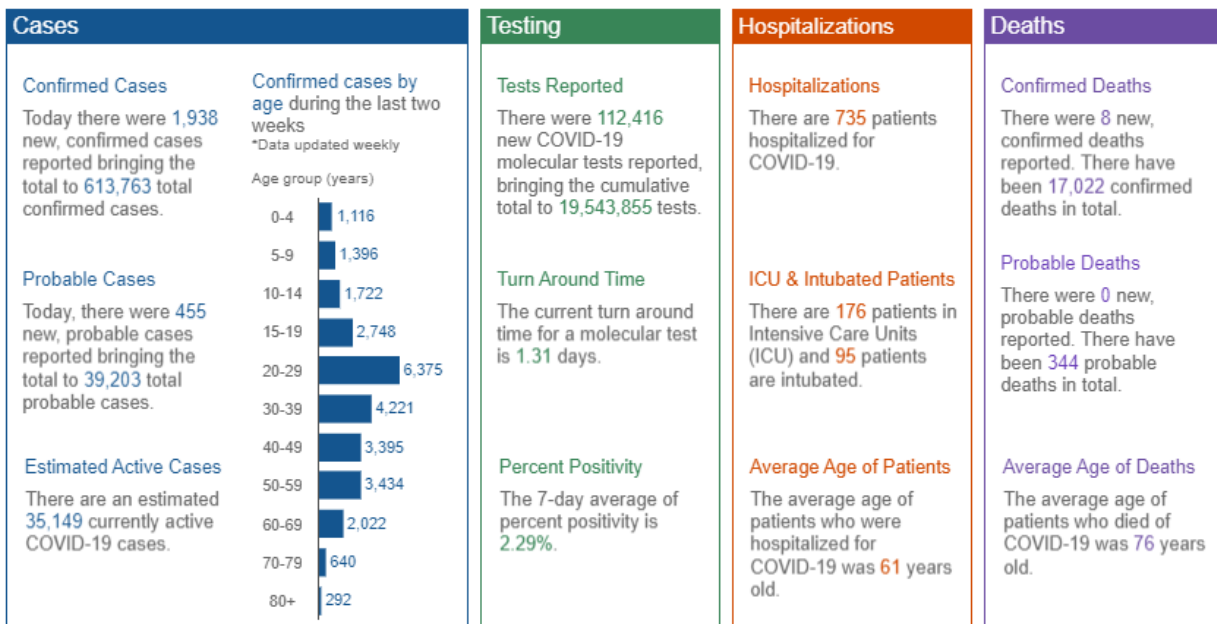
Here in Newton, Boston College does significant testing on their campus – 12,291 tests last week from March 29 – April 4, according to their website. We don't know precisely how this impacts Newton's positivity rate because we don't know how many of those tests are administered to Newton residents. (Students, faculty and staff who live in housing that is not in Newton would not be considered a Newton test.)

That said, 12% of Newton's cases this reporting period are from the Boston College community.

The Boston College data can be found [here](#).

State data shows that young people between the ages of 20-29 account for the largest number of cases, and the latest state data shows an average age of those in the hospital as 61.

See the Department of Public Health chart below with the information as of yesterday. (Click on the chart to link to the State's daily data dashboard.)



## Losses

This week we lost another Newtonian, bringing the number of our neighbors who have died with COVID-19 to 214. We grieve for each of these people and for those we've loved and lost who lived in other cities and towns, and other states and countries.

To endure the death of someone we love is heartbreaking. To endure it alone, unable to be surrounded by family and friends, is almost unimaginable. And yet, for so many, that is what they have experienced this past year. On Tuesday evening we gathered at City Hall to mark a year since our first death in this pandemic. We lit candles for each person we lost. We tried to send a message to those who loved them that they are not alone.

## Newton Public Schools COVID-19 Data

This past week, an additional 19 people in the Newton Public Schools community tested positive, bringing the cumulative total to 364 people since September 14, 2020. This includes 16 students learning in person, 2 staff members working in person, and 1 student in the DLA/remote learning program.

We started a pooled testing program for those who are teaching and learning in-person on March 1 for faculty and staff and on March 8 for high school students. 917 people participated this past week, representing 42% of the eligible faculty/staff and 29% of the eligible students. The pooled testing program has identified cumulatively two positive faculty/staff members and three positive students. (The other people who have been found positive had tests done in other ways.)

The dashboard with week by week school data from the pooled testing program is available [here](#) and the overall school data is [here](#).

## Vaccination Update

This week's State vaccination information shows that 44,418 Newtonians, or 48% of our population, have had at least one dose.

The state data also shows that 30% of Newton's population is now fully vaccinated with 18% partially vaccinated. (A week ago, we were at 27% and 16% respectively.) Newtonians who are partially or fully vaccinated include 95%+ of those who are 75+, 95%+ of those 65-74 years old, 69% who are 50-64 years old, 52% who are 30-49 years old, 30% that are 20-29 years old, and 5% who are 0-19 years old. To see the detailed vaccination information for each city and town in Massachusetts by age, sex, race and ethnicity, and zip code, click [here](#).

You can find a vaccination appointment or register to be notified when it's your turn at a mass vaccination site at [vaxfinder.mass.gov](https://vaxfinder.mass.gov).

Newton-Wellesley Hospital  
President Dr. Errol Norwitz  
spoke eloquently at  
Tuesday's Candlelight



Memorial about the lessons learned through the pandemic, including resilience and teamwork.

Earlier he reminded me, "We can't make the vaccine do all the work." In the race of the vaccines against more contagious variants, we need to continue to wear our masks, wash our hands, and be cognizant about with whom, where and when we are within 6 feet of others.

*(Photo: Mayor Fuller, Rev. Johnson from the Myrtle Baptist Church, resident Lakshmi Narayan, Dr. Errol Norwitz, President of Newton-Wellesley Hospital, Cellists Adrienne Hartzell Knudsen and Duke Roth, U.S. Congressperson Jake Auchincloss, State Representatives Kay Khan, Ruth Balser and John Lawn, City Council President Susan Albright, City Councilors Deb Crossley, Brenda Noel, Holly Ryan, Bill Humphrey, and (not pictured) School Committee Member Tamika Olszewski. Thanks go to Winston Flowers for lending us the candles and candle holders.)*

### **Proposed Changes to Riverside Special Permit to Allow Life Science**

The City Council Land Use Committee and the Newton Planning and Development Board will open a joint public hearing next Tuesday, April 13 at 7:00 p.m. on a proposed amendment request to the previously approved Zoning and Special Permit granted to develop the Riverside MBTA parking lot and adjacent former Indigo hotel site.

Located on Grove Street right by I-95 and the Mass Pike, the developer, Mark Development, is seeking to replace the planned hotel with a life science building and repurpose a planned office building to a life science laboratory and research facility. Combined, the two buildings would provide 362,000 square feet of laboratory and research space.

This proposed change comes as a number of communities (e.g., Watertown and Weston) near Newton are receiving significant interest from life science companies (Read a *Boston Globe* article about this [here](#) if you have a subscription.) The City of Newton is as well. Last month, Alexandria Real Estate Equities received a Special Permit from Newton's City Council to convert 63,000 square feet in the nearby Riverside Office Park for a medical robotics company. Alexandria is the company working with Mark Development to request the change in the Riverside Special Permit to allow for life science space.

The life science industry is active in other sections of Newton with locations in both Nonantum (e.g., Labshares Newton) and at Wells Avenue (e.g., Karyopharm Therapeutics).

The article by Jon Chesto in the Boston Globe yesterday quoted a research director at a commercial real estate broker expecting that life science space in Greater Boston could double to 60 million square feet over the next ten years. Interested in learning more? The Newton-Needham Regional Chamber hosted a webinar on the life sciences sector last week which can be viewed [here](#).

The proposed amendment to the Riverside special permit seeks to make two height changes: (1) increase the height of the lab building which replaces the planned hotel and (2) decrease the height for the lab building which replaces the office building. Other changes sought include a reduction in overall housing units (from 582 to 550) and an increase in parking spaces (from 2,032 to 2,267).

As part of the Special Permit review, the City Council and Planning Department will reexamine many of the analyses undertaken as part of the formerly approved project, including the fiscal benefit to the City (projected by the applicant to increase by \$800,000/year), affordable housing (increased from 102 to 111 units), and transportation impacts (projected by the applicant to be less at peak traffic times).

Stay tuned as Tuesday evening is expected to be the first of multiple public meetings on this request.

## **Fair Housing Workshops**

The Fair Housing Act was passed in April, 1968 with the hopeful goal of eliminating racial segregation and ending housing discrimination.

All these years later, we know those noble goals are still elusive.

We must do better.

As I declare this month of April *Fair Housing Month* in the City of Newton, we rededicate ourselves to speak and act in favor of opening doors to housing across our City and in all 13 villages to people of all economic means, all ages, all races, all ethnicities; to evaluate policies and procedures and to make decisions about zoning, development, affordable housing and transportation through the lens of equal opportunity; and to continue the work on all fronts to live up to the ideals enshrined in the landmark *Fair Housing Act* so we can truly bring alive Newton's core values of respect, diversity and acceptance.

A fundamental step in furthering fair housing is education.

Join me this month for two Fair Housing Workshops sponsored by the WestMetro HOME Consortium. Choose either the Sunday, April 11, 3 p.m. or the Thursday, April 29, 7 p.m. Zoom session. To register and learn more about these workshops and other fair housing events across the region, visit [newtonma.gov/FHMonth](https://newtonma.gov/FHMonth). For more information on Fair Housing, please visit [newtonma.gov/FHResources](https://newtonma.gov/FHResources).

Read my full statement about Fair Housing Month in the City of Newton [here](#).



## A New Bridge Over the Charles

You may have noticed a dilapidated, blocked-off bridge over the Charles River off Christina Street just east of Needham Street in Upper Falls leading to a forested area on the Needham side.

Built in 1959, trains stopped crossing this state-owned bridge in 2010. Since then, it's fallen into disrepair with compromised piers holding it up. Two years ago, with the deteriorating conditions, pedestrian access to the bridge from the parking lot of the Barry Price Center was chained off while we applied for state grant money to begin a process to renovate and transform the use of the bridge.

After successfully obtaining \$56,700 from the MassTrails Program, we are now beginning a feasibility study.

The project will provide an assessment of reuse or replacement of the Christina Street bridge for use as a fully accessible, shared-use bicycle and pedestrian connection between Newton and the Blue Heron Trail in the state Department of Conservation and Recreation land in Needham. The new bridge will help link together the Newton side of Needham Street with the Needham Crossing area east of I-95, with possible future connections to the Upper Falls Greenway.

Once structural and geometric assessments are completed, design scenarios will be developed for rehabilitating the existing bridge, demolishing the existing bridge, reconstructing in place, or constructing a new bridge in a new alignment. Concept level plans will then be developed for the preferred scenario.

The feasibility study will lay the foundation for the construction of a fully accessible, shared-use path connection, when funding is available.

We need your help to make sure as many voices are heard in the designing of this important regional connection. If you have a few minutes, please click on the

introductory video from Assistant Environmental Planner Clair Rundelli below, and fill out this brief survey [here](#).



### Mental Health: Continuing the Conversation

Now more than ever, let's work together to keep the conversation around mental health going. Newton Health & Human Services (HHS) is partnering with Samaritans Inc. and Families for Depression Awareness for a webinar on **Thursday May 6<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 p.m.** We will focus on suicide prevention, recognizing depression and bipolar disorder, and the important work being done to reduce the stigma of mental health issues

in our community. Please register [here](#).

Health and Human Services 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 additional information please feel free to call 617-796-1420 or to visit the Social Services page click [here](#).

As we look ahead to getting back to "life," we know life for many of us will be profoundly different. We also know that we can't always see the pain in our neighbors' hearts.

Let's try to be gentle with one another as we emerge from the pandemic.

To our Newton neighbors who on Monday will begin their month-long observance of Ramadan, Ramadan Mubarak.

Warmly,

Ruthanne



P.S. Learn more about **MBTA Green Line accessibility improvements** at the Waban, Eliot and Chestnut Hill stations in Newton (and Beaconsfield in Brookline) at a virtual meeting on Monday, April 29 at 6:00 p.m. MBTA staff will share preliminary designs for the \$8.7 million project to improve accessibility at the stations which currently have significant barriers for riders with disabilities. Learn more about the project [here](#). Visit the [April 29 event page](#) for details on

joining the Virtual Public Meeting via Zoom or by telephone.

P.P.S. Since it's [National Library Week](#), check out some of the upcoming **Newton Free Library** programs. From learning about options for taking a Gap year before college (Wednesday, April 14, 7:00 p.m.) to a zoom class on knitting basics (Thursday, April 15, 7:00 p.m.), find something that might interest you [here](#). If you call or stop by in person, consider saying thanks to our staff who are frontline workers.



P.P.P.S. The next **Household Hazardous Waste collection** dates are Thursday, April 29 and Thursday, May 20 by appointment only. Appointments can be scheduled by calling Customer Service at (617) 796-1000, Monday through Friday between 8:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. What's accepted? Click [here](#) for more info.



Mayor Ruthanne Fuller | 1000 Commonwealth Avenue, Newton, MA 02459

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