

Friday, April 16, 2021

Mayor's Update

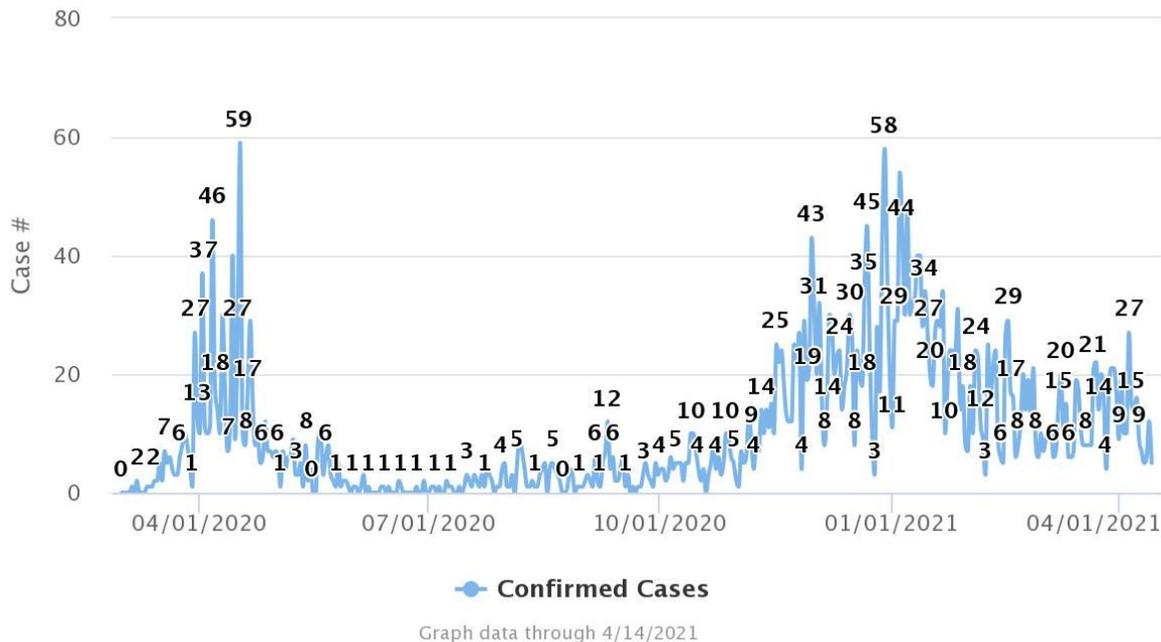


COVID-19 Updates and Losses

We had 66 additional confirmed cases of COVID-19 over the past seven days from April 8–14, the fewest we've seen in a week since early November. The new cases bring our cumulative total of Newtonians who have tested positive to 4,155. The 66 new cases this week is 25 fewer than the 91 new cases we saw over the previous seven days, and fewer than the 138 cases we saw during the seven days prior to that.

Over the two-week tracking period used by the State from March 28 – April 10, Newton had 212 new cases compared to 220 during the previous two weeks, and 182 during the reporting period prior to that.

Newton COVID-19 Cases



Our average daily incidence rate also shows progress during this two-week state reporting period during which we saw 16.5 cases per 100,000, fewer than the 17.1 reported last week.

Another indicator we keep track of and report is the positivity rate, where again, we see things moving in the right direction. This week 0.66% of the 34,997 tests administered to Newton residents over the past two-week

COVID-19 in
Newton

Total Cases

4,155

Total Deaths

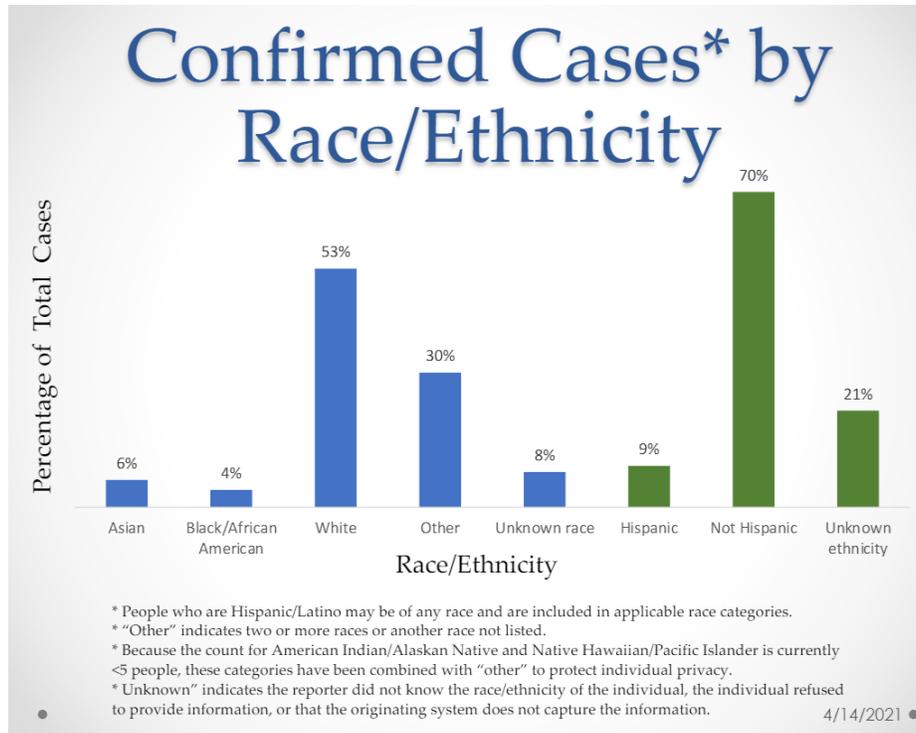
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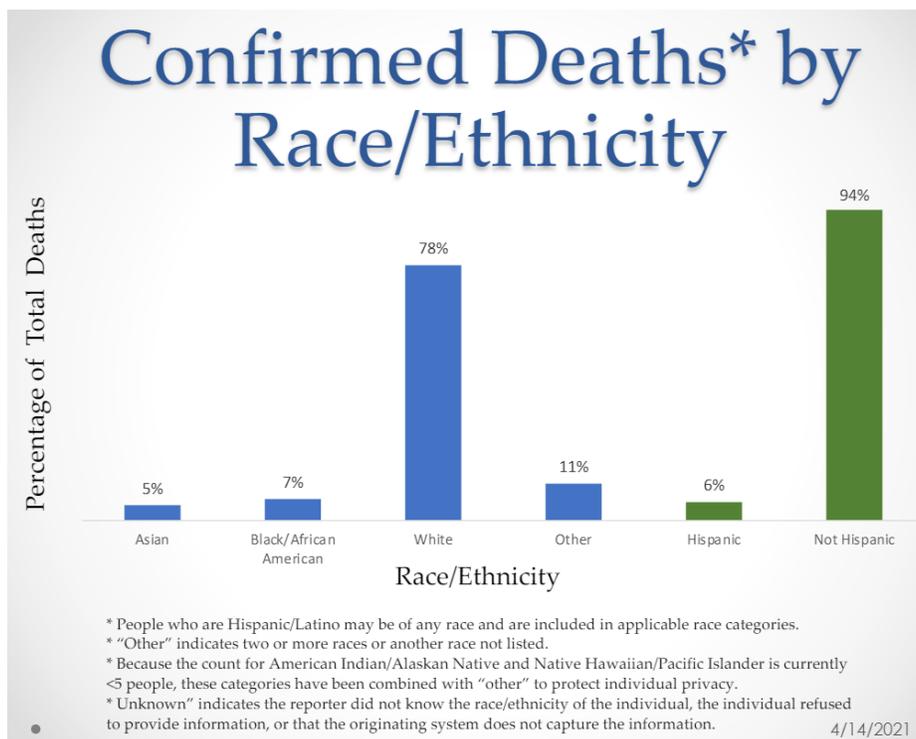
*As of 4/14/21

reporting period came back positive. A week ago we reported that the positivity rate was 0.75% of the 32,282 tests. The statewide positivity rate stands at 2.48%, slightly down from the 2.54%, last week (with 1.2 million tests performed during this reporting period).

Cases among the Boston College community also continue to be encouraging. This week cases from the Boston College community account for 13% of Newton’s total number of new confirmed cases. BC data can be found [here](#).

The Newton Health and Human Services Department has expanded the periodic data report with additional information including cases and deaths by race, and ethnicity. The confirmed cases by race/ethnicity show 4% of our total cases are among Black/African Americans, 6% among Asians and 9% among Hispanics. The confirmed deaths by race/ethnicity graph show 7% of our total deaths are among Black/African Americans, 5% among Asians and 6% among Hispanics. Thus, there are some disproportionate outcomes as the demographics of Newton’s population using the 2019 estimated census data is 3% Black/African Americans, 14.8% Asians and 4.9% Hispanics. Find the updated report [here](#).





Losses

This is the best news of the week. I am relieved to be able to report we lost no one in Newton this week who died with COVID-19

Newton Public School COVID-19 Data

This past week, an additional 14 people in the Newton Public Schools community tested positive, bringing the cumulative total to 382 people since September 14, 2020. This includes 12 students learning in person, 1 staff member working in person, and 1 student in the DLA/remote learning program.

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 50,853 Newtonians, or 55% of our population, have had at least one dose.

The state data also shows that 35% of Newton's population is now fully vaccinated with 20% partially vaccinated. (A week ago, we were at 30% and 18% respectively.)

Newtonians who are partially or fully vaccinated include 95%+ of those who are 75 years old or more, 95%+ of those 65-74 years old, 81% who are 50-64 years old, 65% who are 30-49 years old, 38% that are 20-29 years old, and 8% 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. Starting on Monday, April 19,

everyone age 16 and older are eligible for the vaccine.

As many of us probably already heard, the CDC and FDA this week [recommended a pause](#) in the use of Johnson & Johnson's COVID-19 one-dose vaccine to investigate six reported cases of a rare and severe type of blood clot in women who received the J&J vaccine in the United States.

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) directed all COVID-19 vaccine providers to immediately pause administration of the J&J vaccine until federal health experts further investigate these cases. None of the six known cases among the nearly 7 million J&J vaccines administered across the United States occurred in Massachusetts.

Last week, DPH allocated doses of the J&J vaccine to Newton's Health and Human Services Department for our homebound vaccination program. None of these doses have been administered. The home visit program is currently on hold until we receive further direction from DPH about the J&J vaccine and/or a supply from the Commonwealth of the Moderna or Pfizer vaccines. People who are homebound and are interested in a COVID-19 vaccination home visit for themselves or their loved one may still leave a voicemail on our COVID-19 vaccine hotline at 617-796-1666 and a member of our team will return your call to screen for eligibility.

If you were scheduled for a J&J vaccine, contact the provider with whom you are scheduled.

If you received the J&J vaccine and have questions or concerns, contact your health care provider. If you received the J&J COVID-19 vaccine and develop a severe headache, abdominal pain, leg pain, or shortness of breath within three weeks after vaccination, contact your health care provider or seek medical care right away.

Regulating Gun Stores in Newton

Like many of us, I am deeply concerned about a firearms store which has started taking the steps to potentially open in Newtonville at 709 Washington Street near many homes and restaurants and proximate to schools. I brought together our team at City Hall to brief me on our options.

Thanks to the thoughtful collaboration of City Council President Susan Albright, the City's Law, Planning, Inspectional Services, and Police Departments, today I and members of the City Council have jointly docketed an amendment to the City's zoning ordinance that would only allow firearms sales related uses in certain zoning districts in the City. It will also require firearms sales uses to be approved by special permit by the City Council. Finally, it will create specific special permit criteria, including a buffer zone between a firearms dealer and residences and schools.

What is the process moving forward for the proposed zoning amendment?

The City Council will assign the proposed zoning amendments to the appropriate committees at its meeting on Tuesday, April 20 and also assign a public hearing date. It is likely that the matter will be assigned to the Zoning and Planning

Committee (ZAP) for a public hearing on May 10, 2021. At the public hearing, the Council will hear input from the public. It will then discuss the draft language, potentially make revisions, and ultimately recommend that matter to the full City Council for a final vote to approve the zoning amendments.

In general, zoning is prospective and would not limit ongoing uses and businesses that are already operating.

However, the State Zoning Act, Chapter 40A, does state that any approved zoning amendment will apply to any use/business that has not commenced prior to the publication of notice of the public hearing for the zoning amendment.

It is expected that the City Council will provide notice of the public hearing in the newspaper on April 26 and May 3, 2021. Practically speaking, if there is a proposed firearm dealer use that has not started operating by those dates, it will be subject to the proposed zoning amendments whenever those amendments are passed.

Why are we not prohibiting gun stores everywhere in Newton?

The City Council has broad authority to regulate all land uses in Newton, including the location of firearms dealers. That said, in light of the nature of the issues and the implications of Constitutional protections, it may be reasonable to expect that the more restrictively firearm sales are regulated, the more likely such regulations will be subject to a court challenge.

What to learn more? Click [here](#) to read a FAQ prepared by the Law Department on the regulation of firearms dealers in Massachusetts.

Two Arrests

Newton Police today made an arrest in connection with one of the house break-ins that occurred in the City over the past several weeks.

Newton detectives arrested the suspect in Boston on a warrant from the Newton District Court and charged the person with receiving stolen property from one of the homes broken into over the weekend of March 15 –16.

I'm very grateful for the around the clock work by detectives in the Newton Police Department which resulted in the arrest. The Boston Police Fugitive Division also assisted.

Newton Police earlier in the week also arrested a suspect in the process of breaking into a garage. This person was also charged with theft of a bicycle from another location and detectives are investigating whether he is connected to any of the break-ins.

While detectives continue their work, police advise that we all continue to lock our windows, doors and cars, and make sure there are no free-standing ladders outside that could be used to access second floor windows, doors or a porch. If you have

outdoor lights, please keep them on overnight and if you have motion detectors or a home alarm system, please enable them.

Anyone who may have information regarding the break-ins is asked to call the Newton Police Department Detective Bureau at 617-796-2104 or use the Police "tip line" at 617-796-2121.

Consider signing up to receive emergency information through the City of Newton's Code Red system which sends a text or a phone message. Sign up [here](#).



Recognizing Our "First" First Responders

Our next Newton Police Chief John Carmichael and I visited NPD Headquarters yesterday to meet members of the department. We also had a chance to thank our public safety telecommunications staff who answer all our emergency 911 calls. Chief Carmichael began his law enforcement career as a dispatcher and deeply respects

our "first" first responders. Our dispatch staff work 24/7 and 365 to answer the stream of approximately 400 calls a day to police, fire and 911 lines, perform dispatch and crisis intervention, ask questions, and provide pre-arrival instructions all while monitoring and operating our extensive computer and radio systems.

(Photo: I'm with Chief Carmichael and members of the Newton Public Safety Telecommunications staff.)

Improving the Countryside Elementary School

Together with Ruth Goldman, Chair of the School Committee, and David Fleishman, Superintendent of the Newton Public Schools (NPS), I'm pleased to report that the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) voted on Wednesday, April 14 to invite our Countryside Elementary School into their funding process. Known as the MSBA Core Program, we're now in the first stage called the Eligibility Period.



Even as the Countryside School will get started in the MSBA funding process, the City of Newton and NPS have several other school projects in varying stages of design and construction. The Oak Hill Middle School classroom addition will be completed this summer, on

schedule. We look forward to moving ahead on important school building projects for our Newton Early Childhood Program and the Lincoln-Eliot Elementary School communities that were put on hold last year because of the financial impact of the pandemic. At the same time, we are preparing to lay out the path to get started on a project for the Franklin Elementary School community.

The City and Newton Public Schools had identified Franklin and Countryside as the top priorities for school improvement projects for MSBA funding in submittals over the past few years to the MSBA.

Over the 2012 to 2019 time period, we rebuilt three elementary schools (Angier, Zervas and Cabot). Yet, we still have plenty of other school buildings that are on the list to invest in including Ward, Underwood and Horace Mann. The School Committee regularly updates its long-range facilities plans and together we update the City's overall Capital Improvement Plan.

Our next steps on Countryside are to pull together a School Building Committee, including community representatives, to begin a public participation process, and develop a project website.

Calling Emerging Artists, Entrepreneurs and Innovators

Newton is partnering with the Town of Needham to launch *Project: Pop-Up* with \$133,000 in State COVID-19 economic recovery funding. Five vacant storefronts across Newton (with another three in Needham) can be filled by retailers, artists, food purveyors or other small businesses. These entrepreneurs can pop up for two to three months at a subsidized rate and have access to a suite of resources to help them succeed. [UpNext](#), a Newton-based startup that cultivates innovative retail opportunities, is helping us with the initiative.



Thanks go to the Massachusetts Office of Business Development and their Regional Pilot Project Grants program for supporting small business, helping village centers and fostering innovation.

Interested in being a part of Project: Pop-Up? Learn more [here](#).

New City Treasurer/Collector

I am pleased to welcome M. Ronald Mendes back to Newton as our Treasurer/Collector following the retirement last month of Rosemarie Woods.

During the search process, Ron demonstrated a clear mastery of the Treasury/Collector responsibilities. He is an effective and forward-looking municipal leader with the experience, skills and certifications needed for this important City role. His emphasis on financial transparency and inter-departmental collaboration are important assets. His enthusiasm, his curiosity, and his warmth are infectious.

In his twenty years of municipal experience, Ron has been a Treasurer/Collector in two communities, an Assistant Treasurer/Collector in another, and a Business Manager here in Newton's Department of Public Works. We know Ron well and welcome him back to this new role. Most recently Ron has been triple-hatted as the Treasurer/Collector, Chief Procurement Officer and Assistant Town Administrator in the Town of Swampscott since 2014.

After being confirmed by the City Council, Ron will begin in his position in mid-May.

HeatSmart Newton

HeatSmart Newton, the City's program to help us switch over to clean heating, cooling and hot water technologies, is being extended for a second year. The program provides education and discount pricing to help Newton residents install efficient, electric heating equipment.

We launched the program in April 2020 with a HeatSmart 2020 grant from the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center and the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources. Thanks to the help of volunteers from Green Newton, the City is continuing the program with no additional funding through 2021.

Heat pumps use electricity rather than natural gas or heating oil. Using electricity rather than fossil fuels is one of the keys to implementation of the City's Climate Action Plan. Why is electricity a better source of energy? Electricity can be created by solar, wind and other non-fossil fuel sources.

The program will continue to work with City-vetted installers, New England Ductless and Muirfield Mechanical, which together have contracted so far with more than 75 Newton households to update their heating, cooling and hot water systems with efficient electric heat pump technology. Under the program, the installers are providing Newton with a discount on heat pumps as compared to their usual prices.

Interested in heat pumps for your home? Check out the HeatSmart Newton website at wepowr.com/HeatSmartNewton or contact a Newton Energy Coach at newtonenergycoach.org.

Overcoming Unconscious Bias

While the responsibility of diversity, equity and inclusion is the responsibility of everyone, I feel a special and unique responsibility as Mayor to actively commit to confronting racism and hate.

My goal is that all City services and interactions are provided in a fair, just, respectful and equitable way, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, socioeconomic status, geography (North/South), etc. I believe to be a truly inclusive City, we all need to think about our biases; we all have them, and we all need to take active steps to make sure we are aware of our blind spots.

We're taking steps at City Hall to do just that. In a few more weeks, all City department leaders and supervisors will have received training on both Overcoming Unconscious Bias and Inclusive Leadership. This work is just the beginning. The training will be extended in the coming months to more employees, other elected officials, and members of our Boards and Commissions.

Warmly,

Ruthanne



P.S. Mask Up and Clean Up! **NewtonSERVES**, our annual day of community service returns this year on Sunday, May 2 in a limited way to ensure safety of all our volunteers and staff. The Parks, Recreation and Culture Department, in partnership with Newton Community Pride, is happily supporting 30 project sites around the city. Want to help out?

[Volunteer registration](#) is open until April 21

P.P.S. **Celebrate Earth Day** which is next Thursday, April 22 in a whole bunch of ways. Join Green Newton's Youth Leader and Newton North Senior Coral Lin in making posters virtually on Monday, April 19. (Please R.S.V.P to marcia@greennewton.org by April 18.) On Earth Day, join Green Newton from 4:30 – 6:00 p.m. on the carriage lane of Commonwealth Avenue near City Hall for music and fun decorating bicycles and electric vehicles with eye-catching green ribbons. Later that evening, from 7:00–8:00 p.m., learn about the environmental impacts of meat, dairy, eggs and the fishing industries at a special Green Newton Speaker Series Earth Day online program with Sara Sezun, Chair of the Sierra Club MA Chapter Plant-based Planet Team. (Register [here](#).)

P.P.P.S. Have you ever seen someone ride a bicycle backwards while sitting on the handlebars and juggling? Li Liu, an award winning acrobat who grew up in Northeast China does that and so much more. She'll be performing her one-woman show celebrating **the history of acrobatics in China** and then answering questions online next Wednesday, April 21, at 4:30 p.m. Registration for the online performance is required for this Newton Free Library program made possible by the Nancy Lurensky Swidler Memorial Fund. Register to see Li Liu [here](#).



P.P.P.P.S. Congratulations to the **Newton South Jazz Ensemble** who are one of the 15 finalists nationwide for the 26th Annual Essentially Ellington Festival, the most coveted distinction in Jazz education. Conductor Lisa Linde of the NSHS faculty and the students made magic despite such the difficulties of masks and physical distancing. Click [here](#) to hear a recording of the Ensemble's submission of **Duke Ellington's Sugar Hill Penthouse**.



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

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