

Friday, July 9, 2021

Mayor's Update



COVID-19 and Variants

Newton's Health and Human Services staff continue to pay close attention to COVID-19 and the variants. They look to the experts here in the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for up-to-date information.

According to Shin-Yi Lao, a public health nurse and Newton's Public Health Manager, the CDC is continuously monitoring for variants as viruses – including COVID-19 – constantly change through mutation. Why do the variants matter? Some variants can spread more easily, cause more severe disease, and can be more resistant to existing vaccinations and treatments.

The CDC has identified four notable variants so far in the United States. Alpha was first detected in the U.S. in December 2020 while Beta and Gamma were first detected in January 2021.

The fourth variant, identified as Delta and first detected in the country in March 2021, is now found in all 50 states and accounts for a majority of the new cases in America, nearly 52% of them, according to the CDC as of Wednesday.

The good news is that the data so far shows vaccines used in the United States appear to be quite effective against all of the variants circulating here, especially for those of us who are fully vaccinated.

Infectious disease experts agree that the best way to stop the mutations *and* the spread of new variants is to stop the spread of the virus. Vaccines are our best tool for doing this.

Two Newtonians, Robert Hecht and Shan Soe-Lin from Yale University, authored a guest column in the Boston Globe yesterday which included the admonition, "Run, do not walk, to get your shot, if you haven't been vaccinated already. Together we can blunt Delta and any of its cousin variants that might be out there waiting to burst on the scene."

What if you are one of the 450,000 people in Massachusetts who got a first, but not a second, shot of Moderna or Pfizer? Hecht and Soe-Lin wrote that one dose only provides 34% protection against Delta, so if you have not yet received your second dose, be sure and do so.

Should we be wearing masks?

Here's what Newton resident Dr. Ashish K. Jha, Dean of Brown University's School of Public Health and professor of Health Services, Policy and Practice wrote in yesterday's Boston Globe, "The evidence right now says if you live in a highly vaccinated community with low infection rates, fully vaccinated people can skip the mask if they are willing to tolerate a minuscule risk of a breakthrough infection. For people who live in low vaccination, high infection communities, the choice is different: Mask up indoors or be willing to accept a far more meaningful risk of getting the virus."

Newtonians have been remarkable about getting vaccinated. Dr. Jha told The Atlantic that Newton is one of the safest places in the world with respect to the coronavirus because 95%+ of everyone who is 30 and older have gotten at least one dose.

Not yet vaccinated? Find vaccine availability at vaxfinder.mass.gov.

If you are vaccinated, remember to take a shot at winning \$1 million, or for youngsters 12 – 17 a college scholarship. The entry deadline for the first drawing is Thursday, July 22. The winner will be announced on Thursday, July 29. Sign up and get more details and dates for the next four drawings [here](#).

COVID-19 Testing

After conducting almost 40,000 tests since opening in December 2020, the drive-through testing site at the Riverside MBTA Station in Newton run by [CIC Health](#) is closing at the end of this month, Saturday, July 31. We are thankful to CIC Health for this partnership. Visit the [MA website](#) to find another testing option. Remember, anyone with [symptoms of COVID-19](#) should get tested, even if fully vaccinated.

COVID-19 Case Update

Our Newton COVID-19 data this week show 18 confirmed new cases in the last two weeks since June 24. This brings our cumulative total of cases over the course of the pandemic to 4,397.

The average daily incidence rate over the past two week state tracking period from June 20 – July 3 is 1.2 per 100,000 (up from 0.5 from June 6 – 19) and the percent of tests performed on Newton residents that came back positive is now 0.2% of the 6,726 tests performed. (The rate was 0.1% of the 6,265 tests performed from June 6 – 19).

This week's State vaccination information shows that 93% of Newton residents who are ages 30 and older are fully vaccinated and 95%+ of Newton residents who are ages 30 and older are partially or fully vaccinated. To see more detailed vaccination information, click [here](#).

The vaccination rates for younger age groups in Newton that are partially or fully vaccinated are:

70% who are 20 – 29 years old
61% who are 16 – 19 years old

93% who are 12 – 15 years old

Finally, and happily, for the fourteenth week in a row, no one in Newton died with COVID-19.

Newton Fire Department's Lt. John "Jay" Bourgeois has been a 22 year member of the Federal Emergency Management's Urban Search and Rescue Incident Support Team (IST). The IST is made up of highly trained specialists from across the U.S. that respond to large, complex incidents to provide communications, logistics and resupply functions. Right now he is deployed on the recovery effort at the condominium collapse site in Surfside, Florida, serving as the Team Leader of Task Force 1 from Massachusetts. He emailed Fire Chief Gino Lucchetti and expects to be in Florida for another couple of weeks. Godspeed Lieutenant as we know the working conditions are difficult in so many ways and the mission is heartbreaking.

(Photo: Lt. Bourgeois in Surfside, Florida.)



Marijuana Update

In November 2018, Newton voters went to the polls to decide on retail marijuana in the City. The outcome resulted in a maximum of eight (8) stores in total. Where are we today?

Newton's second adult-use retail marijuana establishment is scheduled to open today.

The Massachusetts Cannabis Control Commission (CCC) gave its final approval for Redi (formerly known as Cypress Tree) located at 24 Eliot Street at the intersection with Boylston Street/Route 9.

The Special Permit approved by the City Council requires that Redi's retail customers must have an appointment to shop or pick-up products.

As there is limited customer parking in front of the store, a valet will assist with customer parking behind the building, as needed. A police detail (subject to availability) will also be on site for at least six months to direct traffic at the busy intersection during the afternoon rush hour.

As with all retail marijuana stores in Massachusetts, customers must show a valid, government-issued identification to prove they are 21 to enter for their appointment or purchase products.

Garden Remedies, Newton's first adult-use retail marijuana store, opened at 697 Washington Street in Newtonville more than two years ago in May 2019. Since

opening, Garden Remedies has sold to customers by appointment only. The City Council is now in the process of reviewing the stipulation for appointments.

To open, each prospective retailer needs to be approved for both a Host Community Agreement (by the Mayor) and for a Special Permit (by the City Council) as well as licensing from the State's Cannabis Control Commission (CCC). (They also need a building permit from Newton's Inspectional Services Department before any renovations or construction can begin.)

Here is an update on the six other potential adult use marijuana retailers in Newton:

- Ascend, 1089 Washington Street/58 Cross Street just outside West Newton Square, has a signed provisional HCA and an approved Special Permit. Construction is nearing completion and they are awaiting licensing approval by the CCC to open.
- MedMen, 232 Boylston Street/ Rt. 9 in Chestnut Hill (at the former Shreve, Crump & Low location), has a signed provisional HCA and an approved Special Permit. They are awaiting licensing approval by the CCC to open and have yet to apply for a building permit from the City of Newton to begin work on the building.
- Green Lady, 740 Beacon Street in Newton Centre, has a signed provisional HCA and the City Council is currently hearing its Special Permit application. If their Special Permit is approved, they can then move forward with their CCC licensing approval process.
- Union Twist, 1158 Beacon Street in Newton Centre/Four Corners, has a signed provisional HCA and the City Council is currently hearing its Special Permit application. If their Special Permit is approved, they can move forward with their CCC licensing approval process.
- Verilife, 131 Rumford Avenue in Auburndale, has a signed provisional HCA. They have not yet started the City Council Special Permit approval process which they need to do before moving forward in the state licensing approval process.
- Nuestra, 1185 Chestnut Street in Newton Upper Falls, has a signed provisional HCA. They have not yet started the City Council Special Permit approval process which they need to do before moving forward in the state licensing approval process.

State law also allows marijuana research facilities and growing businesses.

One proposed research facility, Curaleaf, 241 Riverview Avenue in Auburndale, is applying to open in Newton. They have a signed HCA and still need a Special Permit from the City Council before moving forward in the state licensing approval process.

In addition, the CCC also recently authorized a new type of marijuana business to open in Massachusetts, a "delivery operator." This allows a marijuana business to buy and store products wholesale from growers and manufacturers and deliver

orders by secure vehicles directly to customers (21 years or older) at their place of residence. No retail business can be conducted at their facility. The “delivery operator license” was set aside intentionally by the CCC for the first three years of the program to only those entities certified as “economic empowerment or social equity” firms.

One of these “social equity” firms, the Emerald Turtle, has recently approached the City seeking a Host Community Agreement (HCA) to locate their delivery operator business at 120 Wells Avenue. The City Council recently approved the “delivery operator” use as a by-right zoning use in manufacturing and limited manufacturing zones. Since Wells Avenue is a limited manufacturing zone, Emerald Turtle will need a signed HCA and CCC licensing approval to open but will not need a Special Permit from the City Council.

At the request of the City, Emerald Turtle will hold a community outreach meeting by Zoom in late July or early August before we consider their request for an HCA. Stay tuned for more information on the date and time of this meeting.

Riding NewMo 2.0

I had my first ride on NewMo 2.0. For \$2, anyone living, working or visiting Newton can access the MBTA Green Line and both the Commuter Rail Framingham/Worcester and Needham lines, two village centers (Newton Centre and Newtonville), Needham Street or the Wells Office Park.

A Newton resident emailed me about his great experience using NewMo 2.0 to get to a Sox game at Fenway. “I walked 200 yards from my house [in Newtonville], and my [NewMo] ride took me to the Chestnut Hill T stop.” The resident then took the Green Line to Fenway and returned after the game on a westbound commuter rail train home to the Newtonville station. “It saved me a car trip all the way to Boston and back.”

NewMo 2.0 is also a great option for employees at Newton stores, restaurants or businesses who want to take public transportation but previously had no easy



and affordable way to get to and from a station to work.

While NewMo 2.0 does not drop off and pickup at every commuter rail and T station, people anywhere in Newton can get a ride to and from a commuter rail and T station on Mondays through Fridays between the hours of 7:30 a.m. and 6:30 p.m.

Download the NewMo app (search for NewMo Newton) on a smartphone or call 617-655-8019 to get started. Those without access to a smartphone can both sign up and book a ride by calling 617-655-8019.

Qualifying low-income residents can receive discounted rides for 50 cents. To see if you qualify, email Nicole Freedman at nfreedman@newtonma.gov.

Want to know more about NewMo? Visit our website at newtonma.gov/Newmo or email NewMo customer support at newmo@ridewithvia.com or call the company we're partnering with, Via, at 617-655-8019.

A New Christina Street Bridge

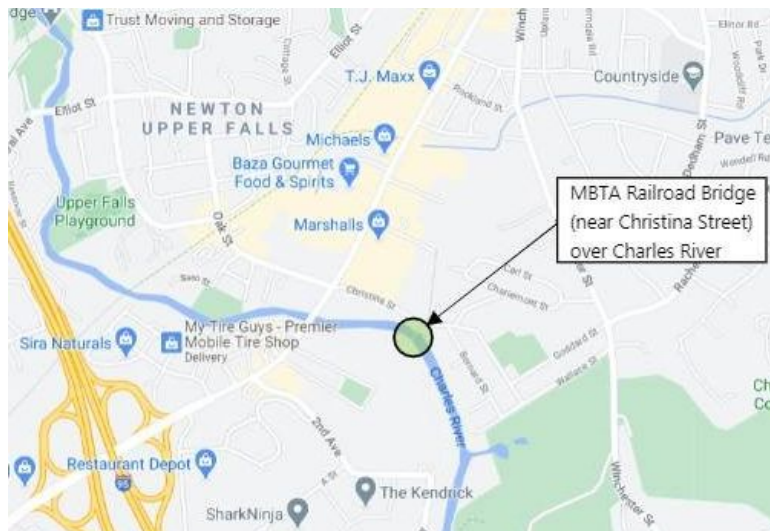
After listening to community members, we have settled on the plan to replace the dilapidated rail bridge built in 1959 known as the Christina Street Rail Bridge. The bridge has been closed as it is unsafe.

We will move forward with constructing a new bridge that addresses our community's passion for creating a bicycle and pedestrian path that will provide recreational access to the DCR land in Needham, and also serves as a green commuter connection for folks working in Newton and Needham.

The preferred design option is a new single-span, pre-fab truss bridge over the Charles River off Christina Street just east of Needham Street in Upper Falls to connect with the forested area on the Needham side of the river. (The bridge will continue to be accessed through the Barry Price Center parking lot. We're working closely with the Barry Price Center to ensure that the final design meets the needs of their clientele.)

Read the newly released Christina Street Rail Bridge Shared Use Path Feasibility Report [here](#).

Next up? We're actively pursuing funding for the final design and construction. We learned yesterday from Rep. Jake Auchincloss that his \$1.6 million earmark for the project, first approved by the U.S. House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, was just approved by the full House.



Please reach out to Claire Rundelli at crundelli@newtonma.gov with any questions or to sign up for continued updates on this project.

Food Insecurity

Nearly 10% of Massachusetts households are experiencing food insecurity. If you or your family would like help this summer, here are five ways to access food in Newton:

- The City of Newton's **Grab & Go Program** continues this summer on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at Newton North and Newton South High Schools from 10:00 a.m. to noon. Newton residents can pick up a bag containing 3 days of breakfast and lunch at either location. Get more information [here](#).
- The **Newton Food Pantry** continues to operate from the War Memorial Circle at City Hall on Wednesdays from 1:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. They've recently updated their logo and renovated their website to support their mission of serving vulnerable Newton residents with dignity, compassion and respect. Get more information [here](#).
- The **West Suburban YMCA** in Newton (in partnership with the Metrowest YMCA) provides grab-and-go meals to children and teens under 18, Monday through Friday. Lunch pick-ups are from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. and snacks from 2:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. at the Y's Welcome Center, 276 Church Street, Newton. No registration, I.D., or membership is required. Get more information [here](#).
- The **Centre Street Food Pantry** provides bags of fresh produce, refrigerated and shelf stable foods as well as personal care items. Delivery is available on the third Saturday of the month to those who cannot visit in person. The Centre Street Food Pantry is open on Tuesdays from 2:30 p.m. to 6 p.m., and on the first Saturday of the month from 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. Get more information [here](#).
- The **Newton Community Freedging**, 420 Watertown Street in Nonantum, offers an assortment of food including eggs, bread, rice, pasta and some prepared foods. Stop by any time, any day. Get more information [here](#).
- The **Arabic Baptist Church Food Pantry and Clothing Closet**, continues to operate at 187 Church Street in Newton Corner. Their pickup times through October are on the second and fourth Friday of every month, from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Get more information [here](#).

**Shop Local at
Project Pop-Up**



Check out the four formerly vacant store fronts in Newton Centre, Newtonville, Newton Highlands and Needham Street now filled with local entrepreneurs, designers and artists.

(Photo: Clockwise from top left, Jessica Brand, co-founder of Tasteful Skin, Tonya Winston, Founder of B. Royal Boutique, Shabranæ Patton, Founder of Anchor'd Inc. and Cristina Garcia, Founder of GarciaCristina)

Shop local at Newton's [Project: Pop-Up](#) locations

through August at:

- [1280 Centre Street](#) in Newton Centre - "Piccadilly Pop-Up" - featuring GarciaCristina (jewelry), Tasteful Skin (skincare), B. Royal Boutique (apparel) and Artist Ian Todreas
- [813 Washington Street](#) in Newtonville featuring Anchor'd Inc. (home décor and accessories) which also helps with post trauma care for survivors of sexual assault and human trafficking
- [1 Lincoln Street](#) in Newton Highlands featuring Hedgehog Belly Designs (kids clothes), puck and abby (home and accessories), Louis Sel (seasonings) and Artists John and Caroline Rufo
- [141 Needham Street](#) at Newton Nexus featuring food from The Bagel Table, Union Square Donuts Outpost, and Clarke's Cakes and Cookies

Big thanks go to our partners: the Town of Needham, the State for \$138,000 in COVID-19 economic recovery funding, Newtonian Allison Yee and her [Up Next](#) Newton-based startup that cultivates innovative retail opportunities, Paula Gannon and Danielle Moriarty of Newton's Cultural Development Department who curated talented artists to be featured gallery-style, and Newton's Economic Development Director Devra Bailen and Director of Transportation Planning Nicole Freedman.

Feed the Meters

A friendly reminder, we'll all have to start paying the meters and kiosks to park our cars at metered spaces and municipal parking lots starting this Monday, July 12.

Warmly,

Ruthanne



P.S. We know things are getting back to normal in Newton when I can say, see you at Festa next week! The **86th Annual St. Mary of Carmen Society Festival** starts on Wednesday, July 14 and runs through Sunday, July 18. Come to Pellegrini Park, 11 Hawthorn Street in Nonantum (5 -11 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday and 4-11 p.m. on Sunday). Enjoy music every night, plenty of food, amusement rides and games, a procession through the streets of Nonantum with

the North End Marching Band on Sunday afternoon at 2:00 p.m. and the candlelight procession to Our Lady's Church Sunday night at 10:00 p.m. More information is [here](#).

P.P.S. Looking for **summer swimming lessons**? We have a few slots open for swimming lessons here in Newton at Gath Pool for the second and third summer sessions – sign up [here](#). The West Suburban YMCA in Newton also has a full schedule of swimming lessons. Most of the summer slots are filled, but the fall sessions start in August and have openings. Get more information [here](#). The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) is offering free 30 minute “Learn to Swim” sessions for children ages 5 and up. There are DCR pools close to Newton in Watertown, Brighton and Cambridge. Contact Debra.Jimenez@mass.gov if you're interested in signing up.

P.P.P.S. Sign up for an appointment to dispose of household hazardous waste at our next City of Newton **Household Hazardous Waste collection** events on Thursday, July 15; Saturday, August 7; and Thursday, August 17. Appointments are available 7:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Call Customer Service at (617) 796-1000 to schedule an appointment; Customer Service is open Monday through Friday between 8:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Curious about what items fall into the hazardous household waste category? Find out [here](#).

P.P.P.P.S. Join me for a full weekend of music at **Newton Community Pride's Linda Plaut Newton Festival of the Arts**, this Saturday and Sunday, July 10 and 11. Special thanks to Festival Chair and Producer Chris Pitts for putting together a top-notch lineup that includes a style to suit everyone's ear. See the full schedule of events [here](#).





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