

Mayor's Update

The number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Newton continues to increase, with 47 new cases over the past seven days from July 21-28 compared with 27 during the previous seven days, and 12 new cases reported during the seven days prior to that. This brings our cumulative total number of cases to 4,484 since the start of the pandemic.



Of the 87 people who tested positive between July 1-27:

- 31% were under 20 years old
- 23% were between 20 and 39 years old
- 28% were between 40 and 59 years old
- 14% were between 60 and 79 years old
- 5% were 80 years or older

Of the 87 cases between July 1-27, approximately 52% were vaccine breakthrough cases. (In other words, roughly 52% of the people who tested positive in July had been fully vaccinated and are considered “breakthrough cases.”)

COVID-19 in Newton
Total Cases 4,484
Total Deaths 214
<small>*As of 7/28/21</small>

Please know that the data on vaccine breakthrough cases is imperfect. The data are approximate due to many factors, including vaccines and cases being reported in different systems, challenges in linking electronic health records and the state immunization reporting system, and mistakes in data entry.

Given the high vaccination rate in Newton (68,266 people in Newton, or 85% of eligible residents, as of July 27) combined with the rapid spread of the Delta variant, our public health staff expect that fully vaccinated people will make up a significant portion of Newton cases. However, fully vaccinated people make up a small portion of cases in the United States overall and most people who are fully vaccinated will not get infected. Most breakthrough infections are mild – vaccines are working as they should and preventing severe illness, hospitalizations, and death.

The average daily incidence rate in Newton over the past two-week state tracking period from July 11-24 is 4.8 cases per 100,000 people, almost double last week’s incidence rate of 2.5.

The percent of tests performed on Newton residents that came back positive is now 0.9% of the 6,960 tests performed over the two-week state reporting period. (The rate was 0.6% of the 5,675 tests performed from July 4-17.)

The State updates their vaccination data every Thursday by 5:00 p.m. and posts it [here](#).

I am very relieved to say that, even with the increase in positive cases, for the seventeenth week in a row no one in Newton died with COVID-19.

Please know our Health and Humans Services team is closely watching the changing COVID-19 landscape and listening carefully to the health and safety advice from medical experts, the State, and the CDC on masking, vaccinating and testing. We will continue to keep you well informed in the coming days.

Updated Guidance from the CDC

On July 27, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) issued [updated public health recommendations](#) for fully vaccinated people. These updates were made because the Delta variant is much more contagious than past versions of the COVID-19 virus. Although infections happen in only a small proportion of people who are fully vaccinated (nationwide and in Massachusetts vaccinated individuals represent a very small number of infections), preliminary evidence suggests that fully vaccinated people who do become infected with the Delta variant can spread the virus to others.

To reduce the risk of becoming infected with the Delta variant and potentially spreading it to others, the CDC recommends that fully vaccinated people:

- Wear a mask in public indoor settings if they are in an area of [substantial or high transmission](#). In Massachusetts, currently Barnstable, Bristol, Dukes, Nantucket, and Suffolk Counties have substantial or high transmission. Franklin County has low transmission. The remaining counties, including Middlesex County which is the county Newton is in, have moderate transmission.) Fully vaccinated people might choose to mask in public indoor settings regardless of the level of transmission, particularly if they or someone in their household is immunocompromised or at [increased risk for severe disease](#), or if someone in their household is unvaccinated.
- [Get tested](#) if experiencing [COVID-19 symptoms](#), even if they are mild.
- Get tested 3-5 days following a known exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 and wear a mask in public indoor settings for 14 days after exposure or until a negative test result.
- Isolate if they have tested positive for COVID-19 in the prior 10 days or are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms.
- Follow any applicable federal, state, local, tribal, or territorial laws, rules, and regulations.

The State is currently reviewing the CDC updates to determine if changes will be made to the state's COVID-19 guidance.

Vaccines

Vaccination is the most important public health action to end the COVID-19 pandemic.

We continue to have good evidence that our vaccines are safe, effective and provide protection against the variants circulating in the US, including the Delta variant. High vaccination coverage will reduce the spread of the virus and help prevent new variants from emerging. If you get vaccinated, your risk of infection is about 3.5 times lower, your risk of getting sick is about 8 times lower, and your risk of hospitalization or death is about 25 times lower.

I urge parents and guardians to get their eligible children age 12 years or older vaccinated before the school year starts to help make this a successful year of learning and health in our schools. Please encourage your family and friends who are unvaccinated to get vaccinated to help protect each other.

COVID-19 vaccines and appointments are widely available in and around Newton and some accept walk-ins. Visit www.newtonma.gov/covidvaccine for a list of vaccination sites in Newton and vaxfinder.mass.gov for a list of vaccination sites across the state. You can call 2-1-1 for assistance in scheduling an appointment.

The State provides [in-home vaccinations](#) for anyone 12 and older who is unable to get to a vaccine location. Call 833-983-0485 Mon-Fri, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. to register. Representatives are available in both English and Spanish and they also have access to interpreters for over 100 languages. Once you are registered, you will generally be called within five business days to schedule your appointment. In-home vaccinations will be performed by medical professionals and tailored to meet the individual needs of the person.

Organizations who would like to host a vaccine clinic can request [amobile on-site vaccination clinic](#) from the State. A vaccination provider will come to your property to vaccinate individuals, including returning 3-4 weeks later to deliver second doses.



On Tuesday I swung by Barrett Technology in Nonantum along with Newton [Ligerbots](#) team members, Brian Gomez and Daniel Ben-Levi, to visit with CEO Bill Townsend and the Barrett team. Barrett Technology was recently awarded an \$1.6m grant from the National Institute of Health to support their work in designing and producing advanced robotics to help treat stroke patients.

Investing Federal ARPA Dollars

The City of Newton is receiving approximately \$63 million dollars from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, often called ARPA. Congress created specific guidelines for how these funds can be used with two key categories being the most relevant for our City. The first category requires the funds to be used to respond to the COVID-19 public health emergency and its negative economic impacts; and the second allows investment of the funds to make up for the missed investments stemming from the City's "lost revenues" in the face of the pandemic.

I have set out several goals for how we invest these one-time ARPA funds. We

should seed those initiatives that will help Newtonians and our City not just stabilize and recover but permanently be more resilient, more livable, more vibrant, more inclusive, and more sustainable. We should invest the funds using the lens of equity, ensuring all geographic areas of Newton, all ages, all ethnicities and all people are supported while we help those hurt by the pandemic.

Our ARPA investments should be strategic so as to complement those of State and Federal programs. We will want to invest early in the design of “shovel-ready” infrastructure projects so we are well positioned to take advantage of Federal and State infrastructure aid. Simultaneously we will pay close attention to Federal and State spending decisions so we don’t inadvertently use Newton’s ARPA monies when other funding streams are available.

Where specifically should we invest these funds?

Many people have provided great ideas. Our City Councilors and School Committee members weighed in. Residents, community groups, business owners and the heads of non-profits have spoken up. Many people sent along thoughtful emails to ARPAinput@newtonma.gov.

I will continue to ask for input as many of the investment decisions will be made in the future. We have 3 to 5 years to use the funds. Monies must be incurred by December 2024 or encumbered by that date (i.e., specifically set aside in a special account) and spent by December 2026. Additionally, the category of “lost revenues” is calculated each December between 2021 and 2024 using a U.S. Department of Treasury methodology comparing pre-pandemic City of Newton revenue growth to what happened during and afterwards.

Here is what I've heard from listening to all who have shared their insights and perspectives so far.

First, help those most impacted by the pandemic. This includes people with limited resources who may need help with housing and food insecurity, job skills and financial literacy, or childcare, and/or access to health resources. Support those who are unemployed or underemployed. Prioritize our youngest and oldest residents as the restrictions necessary during the pandemic had an outsized impact on them. Focus on diversity, equity and inclusion as people of color, ethnic minorities and other specific groups were disproportionately affected. Invest in helping those needing mental health resources or other medical resources. Ensure that everyone has access to the internet, broadband, and technology, as this is crucial for getting information and services in these times. In addition, use the funds for outdoor spaces (including trees) and recreational opportunities as during the pandemic they proved vital to physical and mental health as well as shared opportunities for community, friendship and happiness.

Second, help with the recovery and rebuilding of our village centers and commercial corridors, and businesses and non-profits. Link employers to employees as so many sectors are facing staffing shortages. Improve our streets, sidewalks and village centers so drivers, bicyclists and pedestrians can get to and from our small businesses and restaurants and enjoy themselves even more when there. Invest in arts, culture and community activities as they are both economic drivers and help us connect and find joy, both of which were in short supply in the last seventeen months.

Third, support the operations of the Newton Public Schools (NPS) and the City in the face of increased needs of our students and residents and the continued revenue losses. Ensure that all our students and staff return to school in the fall in-person with the resources they need for achieving of our goals of academic excellence, educational equity and social and emotional health and wellness. Continue to upgrade the ventilation systems in our buildings as well.

Across many departments, staff are vetting ideas, shaping programs and ensuring we have the capacity to effectively implement new initiatives. This will take time and effort, so we expect to launch programs periodically in the months and years ahead. For those that need community input and planning (and many do), we will do that work sooner rather than later. That said, we are working with a deep sense of urgency as the needs right now are high and immediate help is critical.

Today, we are moving forward with three initial projects that fit both the spirit and specific requirements of APRA including:

- A community needs assessment specifically focused on the needs of our lower-resourced residents to ensure that programming responds to their specific concerns and promotes economic stability
- The renovation and expansion of the Newton Free Library's Children Room
- The creation of a new playground at the Horace Mann Elementary School

Our residents with fewer resources have been especially hard hit by the pandemic. We are contracting with a consultant who specializes in this work to conduct a community needs assessment. Our Health and Human Services Department in partnership with our Planning Department will oversee this work. The community needs assessment will specifically focus on hearing from our low-income residents regarding their needs and developing responsive strategies for promoting economic stability. The needs assessment will take advantage of existing information and data as well as undertake surveys and focus groups designed to amplify the voices of lower-resourced residents. The assessment will be completed during the fall of 2021, with a final report and recommendations that will enable us to implement responsive programs and support during the calendar year 2022 and beyond. The Assessment itself will require \$50,000 in funding with the implementation of the programs considerably more. Additional information will be posted in August [here](#).

Our young children had no play dates and little time socializing for so many months. The Library Children's Room Expansion Project is a transformative investment that will align the space with the incredible demand for our collection, services and programs. The project, which will take 8-10 months to complete, will increase the size of the Children's Room, expand the program space, make family-friendly restrooms, update furniture and add activity stations. The investment will be \$2 million. Find more information [here](#).

Our elementary schools need great playgrounds and our Kindergarten through 5th grade students depend on them. The playground space at the Horace Mann School will include a larger ropes structure that challenges older elementary school children. When the school moved two years ago from Watertown Street next to Albemarle Field over to the renovated former Carr School on Nevada Street, they were not able to bring their large playground structure with them. This will serve as a modern replacement for that structure and allow for physical and social growth for the children. More information will be posted [here](#) over the next several months. This is a

\$250,000 investment.

As a reminder, earlier this year I had committed \$8.35 million in ARPA funds to supplement the FY2022 City Operating Budget (including the Newton Public Schools), make up for pandemic holds on road repair and paving, and undertake a feasibility study for the renovation/addition or replacement of the Countryside Elementary School in partnership with the State's School Building Program. The programs announced today will bring the committed total to \$10.65 million.

Electrification of New Buildings and Substantial Renovations

Newton arguably leads the State in addressing climate change. An important additional step is an ordinance for electrification of new homes and major renovations.

Why Double Down on Electricity?

Newton's Climate Action Plan's motto is "Use Less, Green the Rest." The "Use Less" actions are straightforward. To reduce greenhouse gas emissions, we need to use less energy (by insulating our homes, turning off lights when they are not in use, walking or biking instead of driving, etc.).

But surprisingly, perhaps, to "Green the Rest," we need to use more electricity and less fossil fuel. Burning fossil fuels is the main cause of climate change, because it results in the emission of greenhouse gases. Thankfully, we can make the electric grid cleaner and greener by generating electricity with cleaner, greener renewable sources, especially solar and wind. Renewables dramatically reduce the greenhouse gases from generating electricity.

In Newton, over 60% of our greenhouse gas emissions come from our homes, apartments, and commercial buildings. So, the way we heat and cool these buildings, heat our water, and keep the lights on matters a lot as we work to meet our City-wide greenhouse gas emission reduction goals.

Therefore, to "Green the Rest" we want to electrify everything we can with increasingly "green" electricity. (Massachusetts is on the verge of adding a lot of offshore wind power.) In other words, we can make electricity cleaner and greener, so we need to use electricity for more of the things for which we use energy.

Technological innovations are also helping us use more electricity. New electric heat pump technology for heating, cooling, and hot water are extremely efficient and significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Requiring New Buildings and Major Renovations Be Electric

Brookline, Arlington, Lexington, Acton, and Concord have approved Home Rule petitions which request that the Massachusetts Legislature allow their towns to require new buildings and major renovations to use electricity for heating, cooling, and hot water.

Working with builders, developers, experts among our residents and City Councilors, we have brought forward a draft ordinance and the accompanying Home Rule petition to do this here in Newton.

These electrification requirements apply only to new construction and “substantially remodeled or rehabilitated” buildings (defined in a draft Newton electrification Ordinance as a renovation that affects 50% or more of the building floor area). We want new and remodeled buildings, which will last for many decades, to be fueled with clean, modern, efficient technology.

These new requirements would not apply to stoves. While people in Newton already have positive experiences with electric heat pumps for heating, cooling, and hot water, familiarity with electric induction stoves is less widespread. While we understand the argument for requiring them, many people are deeply devoted to their gas stoves. On balance, we have decided to wait to require electric induction stoves in new buildings or major renovations. (It’s noteworthy that most other towns are also exempting cooking from their proposed bylaws.)

No Substantial Financial Burdens

Thankfully, electrifying new construction and significant renovations is relatively low cost and becoming more so.

Heat pumps for heating, cooling, and hot water are not currently a money-saver. The cost of purchasing and installing the equipment is fairly comparable to the cost of natural gas technology. The annual operating cost of heat pumps is slightly above that of a gas system (but below that of an oil system). That said, the total annualized cost of installation and operating heat pumps is small relative to the annual cost of owning a new home in Newton. Additionally, the State intends to help make electrification more attractive financially by increasing the rebates for heat pump equipment and through other policies that will decrease the cost of renewable power and increase the costs of fossil fuels.

The City Council’s Public Facilities Committee voted unanimously in favor of the electrification ordinance and the Home Rule Petition. It goes before the full City Council on Monday, August 9. I look forward to signing it and forwarding it to the State House so we build a clean future.

Last night, the Fourth Annual Schultz Family Triathlon celebrated the legacy of Dave Schultz in promoting youth fitness, inclusion, community spirit and joy. I joined the Schultz family, Kelly, Maeve, Liam and Emily, as well as Newton Parks, Recreation and Culture Director of Special Needs Mark Kelly, to kick-off the event and cheer on the young athletes.



(Thanks to Newton resident [Vail Fucci](#) for the photo).

Mosquito Season

Mosquitos are out, biting, and, unfortunately, spreading diseases. Mosquitos in cities and towns surrounding Newton have tested positive for West Nile Virus (WNV). The risk level for WNV in Newton has changed to moderate. The risk level for EEE in Newton remains remote. For a risk map of both EEE and WNV, click [here](#).

During these hot, humid summer days when mosquitos flourish, here are some simple steps to protect ourselves and our family from bites and the illnesses they can cause:



- Use an [EPA-registered insect repellent when outdoors](#)
- Wear long-sleeved clothing
- Schedule outdoor activities to avoid the hours from dusk to dawn, peak mosquito times
- Repair damaged screens
- Remove standing water around your residence since mosquitos can breed in even small amounts of water.

Get more information about mosquito-borne diseases from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health [here](#).

Flooding in Newton

We see photos of cities in German and Belgium under water from unprecedented flooding, and water pouring through underground subway stations in China. Here at home, we're seeing an unusually wet July. Our region experienced 9.5 inches of rain through the first three weeks of July – 6 inches more than average and likely the 2nd highest on record for the month. We're witnessing firsthand the impact of rising carbon emissions.

With the Charles River running through Newton, could the scenes of flooding happening across the globe happen right here in our City?

The City of Newton, along with 14 communities along the Charles River, partnered with the Charles River Watershed Association to look into that very question. With help from a grant from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs, engineers from Weston & Sampson developed a [flood model](#) to help these watershed communities understand future flood impacts and assess strategies that will reduce the devastating damage severe floods can cause.

What did the Charles River Flood Model show?

- The 25-year storm of today is predicted to be the 10-year storm by 2070
- The 100-year storm of today is predicted to be the 25-year storm by 2070
- In the future, more land will flood and the flood depths will increase unless we act

The model found that without intervention, a 100-year storm will impact more than 50

critical facilities (four on the edge of possible flooding in Newton) and flood up to 12,500 acres of land within the Charles River watershed – that’s 2,100 acres more than the severe flooding experienced in 2010. It also highlighted that allowing more homes and businesses to be built without appropriate investments simultaneously in flood protection measures will result in increases in downstream flooding and damaging impacts on all residents and especially vulnerable ones.

Two of the four Newton facilities shown in the model map with potential future flooding issues are the Countryside Elementary School and the assisted living center The Falls at Cordingly Dam in Lower Falls. The City’s plans for a new Countryside School will certainly be designed and sited to address flooding issues. The other two Newton facilities – the Solomon Schechter School on Wells Avenue and the Golden Living Center (skilled nursing) in West Newton are only on the edge of potential future flooding, according to the model’s mapping.

Newton is better buffered from flooding than some communities along the Charles River because we have significant state and City-owned open space along our riverbanks. We also have some topographical advantages as flood protection is greatest where there is elevation gain between buildings and the Charles (e.g., Concord Street and much of California Street).

That said, the model shows we must act. Unless we do, Newton, like many communities in the Charles River watershed, will see increased flooding in the decades ahead, not just along the Charles River, but also along local streams like Cheesecake Brook, according to the model.

What can be done now to avoid damaging flooding?

Our own City of Newton [20 year Stormwater Improvement plan](#), our [Climate Action Plan](#) and our [Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment and Action Plan](#) as well as the modeling work by Weston & Sampson identifies several key actions we are undertaking to prevent future flooding. We will increase our tree canopy, improve continuously our culverts & stormwater system, maintain our dams, conserve undeveloped land, build green swales, rain gardens & stormwater storage basins, require all sizeable new buildings to have even more stormwater controls, and build protective features into our street and sidewalk projects (e.g., permeable surfaces and perforated underground storage pipe at our Library parking lot improvement project).

One important initiative in Newton is that our City Engineering Division has been on the forefront of [requiring](#) developers to evaluate and design stormwater systems for major storm events and is increasing the requirements. We are working with City Councilors on a complementary comprehensive Stormwater Management ordinance.

Investing in flooding solutions brings other important co-benefits as well. These actions improve the water quality in the Charles River, reduce heat island effects, lead to cleaner air and increase biodiversity. One project here in Newton is an urban rain garden near Crystal Lake’s shoreline to capture stormwater runoff off Trowbridge Street. That project is currently in final design stages.

New Curbside Clothing/Textile Collection Launching

The City of Newton has partnered with HELPSY to provide Newton residents with clothing and textile collection right at our curbs.

Do you have clothing, shoes, towels, sheets, or other textiles, in any condition that you no longer need or want? You can sign up now to have those items picked up directly at the curb in front of your home.

As the folks at HELPSY say, “Clothes aren’t trash.” 95% of the clothes that HELPSY collects are reused, upcycled, or recycled. By donating our clothes and other unneeded textiles, we reduce what goes into the trash and lower the carbon emissions associated with clothing waste.

Appointments start next week, the first week of August. To make an appointment visit, www.helpsy.co/newtonma. On the day of your appointment, set your items out in a plastic bag at the curb. HELPSY will send a reminder email and/or text ahead of your appointment.

Check out the list of Accepted Items for curbside textile pickup here (scroll down below the map): <https://www.helpsy.co/find-a-bin>.

Patience and Understanding for Employees

This has been a stressful year and a half for all of us. Newtonians have shined by meeting the many challenges of the pandemic by reaching out to help our neighbors and supporting our small businesses. That is why I’m reaching out to reinforce the thoughtful email that the owner of Rosenfeld’s Bagels recently sent to their customers. He asked them to be patient with and kind to staff, employees, and owners of our Newton businesses. Most customers are understanding and polite. But, too often I’ve heard of incidents where staff found themselves facing aggressive or almost abusive behavior. Let’s keep doubling down on the Newton tradition of shopping local laced with kindness and respect.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

P.S. For those who owe back rent on your apartment, funding is available from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts through Metro Housing Boston. Complete the online application at bit.ly/Rentrelief. You will need the following documents to complete the application:

- A photo ID
- Proof of income or evidence of loss of income
- Evidence of need – statement from landlord; proof of crisis

Additional information may be found [here](#). The application can be daunting. If you are having difficulty and would like **assistance with the rental funding application**, please email CAN-DO at info@newtoncan-do.org. You will be able to sign-up for a time to work with a trained volunteer on Saturday, August 7, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at



P.P.S. Interested in the history of Newton? Want to learn more about our community? Historic Newton is working hard to develop and provide programs and events, and they want to hear from you. Take Historic Newton's five-minute Community Survey [here](#) to share your interests. Respond by Sunday, August 15 and receive a gift certificate to the Historic Newton's Museum Shops.

P.P.P.S. Want to clear out your closets, **give away old clothes** and help fund the Rotary Club of Newton's Scholarships? The Rotary Club of Newton, in partnership with HELPSY, Green Newton, and the City of Newton has been hosting monthly Clothing Collection drop-off days. The next Clothing Collection Drive drop off date, sponsored by The Village Bank, is on Saturday, August 7 from 8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. in the back parking lot at The Shops at Chestnut Hill. I'll be there to help collect and sort your unwanted textiles. For more information, including a full list of accepted items (scroll down), click [here](#).

P.P.P.P.S. We can all use a little music in our lives. Thanks to Newton Community Pride, nine **artfully hand-painted pianos** are bringing music to life in our village centers and parks. On Tuesday, we gathered in Farlow Park in Newton Corner to cut officially the ribbon on this project and celebrate the first ever art installation in Farlow Park, Newton South High School rising senior Abby Zheng's beautifully painted piano. Pianist David Polansky took the inaugural performance on the piano accompanied by vocalist Olga Lisovskaya. Special thanks to piano pal Laura Johnson and the Friends of Farlow Park for keeping this piano safe from the elements. Learn more [here](#).



P.P.P.P.P.S. The 6th Annual Athletes Unlimited Cornhole Classic is coming to the American Legion Post 440 on Thursday, August 5 at 5:30 pm. The Cornhole Classic is a two-person double elimination tournament. Cost is \$50 per team to enter and the event features country music, O'Hara's hotdogs, Cabot's Ice Cream sundaes and a cash bar. All proceeds benefit the Newton Athletes Unlimited program which supports over 300 athletes with disabilities. Learn more [here](#).

