

Friday, Aug. 20, 2021

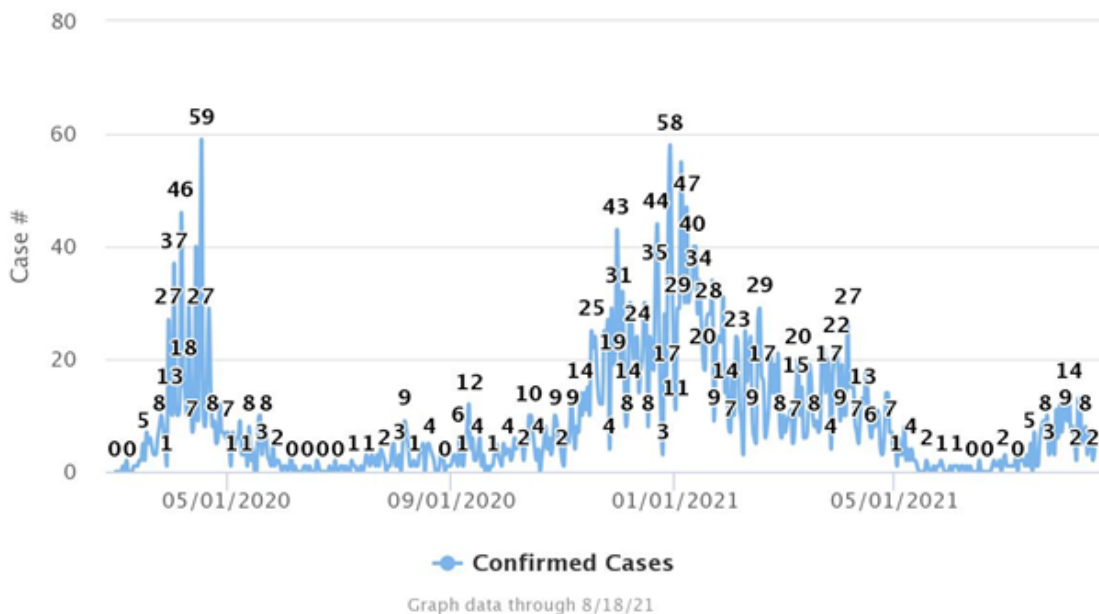
Mayor's Update

We had 48 confirmed new cases of COVID-19 in Newton over the past seven days from Aug. 11 – 18. This compares to 57 new cases last week, and 62 during the seven days prior to that. These new cases bring our cumulative total in Newton to 4,650.



NEWTON COVID-19 CASES

City of Newton, MA 2020-2021



Of the 116 people in Newton who tested positive in the two week period between Aug. 1 and Aug. 14:

- 15% were under 12 years old
- 5% were between 12 and 19 years old
- 31% were between 20 and 39 years old
- 33% were between 40 and 59 years old
- 16% were 60 years or older

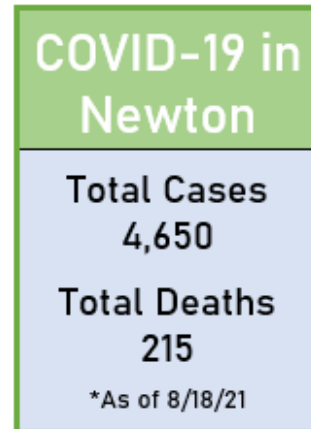
Evidence continues to show that the vaccines are highly effective at preventing infection, hospitalizations, and death. As of Aug. 14, there were 4,388,111 fully vaccinated people in Massachusetts. Of those in MA who were fully vaccinated, 12,641 (0.29% of the vaccinated population) tested positive after they were fully

vaccinated (more than 14 days after the final dose of vaccine). 496 of those 12,641 cases resulted in hospitalization (0.01% of the vaccinated population) and 124 resulted in death (0.003% of the vaccinated population).

The average daily incidence rate in Newton over the past two-week state tracking period from Aug. 1 - 14 is 9.0 cases per 100,000, up slightly from last week's rate of 8.7.

The percentage of tests performed on Newton residents that came back positive remains steady this week at 1.4% of the 10,148 tests performed. The rate was also 1.4% (of 9,030 tests) last week, and 1.2% (of 8,079 tests), during the two-week state testing period prior to that.

Most importantly, this week I can report the good news that no one in Newton died over the past week with COVID-19.



Vaccination Rates by Age and Grade

This week's vaccination information from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health shows that more than 95% of Newton residents who are ages 30 and older are *fully* vaccinated. To see more detailed vaccination information, click [here](#).

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

73% who are 20 – 29 years old (14% of Newton's population are in this age group)

63% who are 16 – 19 years old (9% of Newton's population are in this age group)

95%+ who are 12 – 15 years old (5% of Newton's population are in this age group)

(Note: 13% of Newton's total population is under 12 years old and not yet eligible for a vaccine.)

Below is an additional way of looking at vaccination data specifically for the school age students who attend the Newton Public Schools. The data in the chart below *includes* students who do not live in Newton and attend NPS and *excludes* students who live in Newton and attend private schools or are homeschooled.

Vaccination Rates for Newton Public Schools Students by Grade as of 8/12/21		
Grade	Percentage of Students with 2 doses	Percentage of Students with at least one dose
6 (most students are younger than 12)	2%	3%
7	57%	65%
8	70%	74%
9	70%	75%
10	68%	73%
11	74%	78%
12	79%	82%
All Eligible NPS Students 12 years and up		76%

Note: This chart includes all NPS students, including those that do not live in Newton. This chart does not include students attending non-NPS schools, e.g. private schools.

The data about Newton Public Schools students by grade does not perfectly line up with the data provided by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health by age for a number of reasons. Different students are in each group as noted above. During COVID-19 when vaccination data is reported in real time and data experts correct incomplete, incorrect, or duplicate data entries over time, the data changes. (That said, we feel that it is important to report data that is currently available to us because it provides useful information on overall trends.) The data about NPS students by grade comes from the Newton Public Schools electronic school health record system called SNAP that synchronizes with the Massachusetts Immunization Information System (MIIS) which is used by the state's Department of Public Health. Spelling differences with names, typographical errors, and other issues between the two systems also cause some vaccinated students to be omitted from the NPS data.

Newton-Wellesley Hospital

We checked in with Newton-Wellesley Hospital (NWH) to bolster our understanding of what's happening here in Newton. They provided us with a detailed update:

As of Wednesday, Aug. 18, Newton-Wellesley Hospital had 13 COVID-19 positive inpatients, one of whom is in the Intensive Care Unit.

The volume of COVID patients NWH is currently seeing is lower than they have seen in previous surges. At the peak of the first surge in April 2020, the hospital had a total of 115 patients hospitalized with COVID-19. At the peak of the second surge in January 2021, NWH had a total of 45 patients hospitalized with COVID-19.

According to NWH, the hospital has been observing a slowly increasing number of patients being hospitalized with COVID-19 starting in the middle of July. These more recent COVID-19 positive patients are generally less severely affected, with fewer admissions to the ICU and thus far no COVID-19-related deaths.

Additionally, the Emergency Department (ED) at NWH has been experiencing a significant and sustained surge in patients (non-COVID related) over the past several weeks and the hospital is currently at full capacity. To help manage this situation, hospital leadership has carefully invoked its ED surge plan, which involves

examining all scheduled surgical cases. When and where appropriate, Newton-Wellesley is postponing certain elective surgical cases that require an inpatient surgical bed to ensure ample space and staffing is available to care safely for patients seeking emergency medical care.

Colleges and Universities in Newton

We also regularly check in with all of the institutions of higher education located in Newton – Boston College, Lasell University, the Mt. Ida Campus of UMass Amherst, Hebrew College, and William James College. Every one of them are requiring COVID-19 vaccination for all students who will be on campus. In addition, all except the Mt. Ida Campus of UMass Amherst are also requiring vaccination for faculty and staff. (At this time, UMass Amherst is strongly encouraging and recommending faculty and staff to get vaccinated prior to the fall semester.)

Vaccine Mandate

Gov. Charlie Baker yesterday announced that vaccines will be mandated for all state employees by mid-October, with medical and religious exemptions.

We've also been working on our plan for the City of Newton. Stay tuned.

Booster Shots

Our Health and Human Services Department is also keeping a close eye on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommendations for booster shots. Right now, the recommendation is that people with moderately to severely compromised immune systems receive an additional dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at least 28 days after a second dose of Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine.

We anticipate more information coming about booster shots and our HHS staff is prepared if boosters are recommended for everyone.

Still not vaccinated? Find a vaccine site nearby at vaxfinder.mass.gov.

City of Newton Face Coverings Policy

As we continue to navigate the changing landscape of the COVID-19 pandemic, listen to the medical experts, watch the data here in Newton, monitor mask usage in the city, and recognize the challenges and spread of the Delta variant, we are updating our mask policy to reinforce safety.

Effective this Thursday, Aug. 26, all City of Newton employees and members of the public are required to wear face coverings when inside City of Newton public buildings in areas where the public have access. City of Newton public buildings include, for example, City Hall, the Newton Free Library, the Senior Center, Police and Fire buildings. City employees who are entering non-public buildings (e.g., private residents, stores, and restaurants) as part of their course of business will also be required to wear face coverings. Those with medical conditions that do not

allow for the safe wearing of face coverings and children under the age of 2 are exempt from this policy.

We know masks work. Thank you for wearing masks and helping to stem the spread of COVID-19 in our community.

Opening Schools

As we prepare for the first day of school on Thursday, September 9, this past Monday the School Committee heard recommendations from our Medical Advisory Group (which includes Doctors Brenda Anders Pring, Ashish Jha, Jodi Larson, Sandy Nelson, Eric Rubin, Karen Sadler, Oneeka Williams and Dori Zaleznik).

I agree with every one of their recommendations.

First and foremost, the medical experts strongly support the Newton Public Schools' decision to fully reopen, in person, for students in kindergarten through grade 12 this year to promote learning & social and emotional wellness.

How do we reopen full in person and simultaneously interrupt the spread of the virus in our schools, avoid our faculty and students from becoming ill, and minimize absenteeism?

The Medical Advisory Group made recommendations for a multi-layered approach to help keep everyone healthier and safer and teaching and learning. They know what works. This includes vaccination, masking, testing, quarantining, and other mitigation measures for the start of school.

Vaccination

Strongly endorse vaccination for all eligible faculty, staff and students.

As Dr. Brenda Anders Pring, a pediatrician on the Medical Advisory Board told us Monday night, the vaccination is the best defense against the virus and the best way to protect those under 12 who are not yet eligible.

In making their recommendation, the Medical Advisory Group wrote that vaccines are readily available and are the best means available to decrease the circulation of virus as well as to protect the recipient in most cases from serious COVID-19. Decreasing the amount of circulating virus also lessens the opportunity for the virus to mutate, which, in turn, decreases the risk that a variant will emerge that can evade the vaccinated individual's immune response.

The School Committee will be meeting to decide specifically how to implement this recommendation on Tuesday, August 24 at 7:30 p.m. (the information to zoom in is below).

Masking

All school personnel, visitors and students, regardless of age or vaccination status should wear masks covering their nose and mouth while indoors at all times and when riding on school buses.

Masks can be removed when eating indoors, but should be put back on when leaving the table or when not eating or drinking. When feasible, use additional mitigation approaches including staggered lunch times, optimizing ventilation (such as keeping doors and windows open) and distancing.

Masking outdoors is not necessary.

Testing

Continue the weekly routine COVID safety testing program started last year to screen for virus in asymptomatic individuals. This testing program should be open to all students, faculty and staff. This can be particularly useful this year in elementary schools where the children are generally too young to be eligible for the current vaccines.

BinaxNOW rapid antigen testing should continue to be used to test people who develop symptoms compatible with COVID-19 in schools. This test is easy and quick, with results generally available in 15 minutes. It should also be considered for contacts of cases without symptoms.

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) is in the process of releasing details of its statewide testing program.

Quarantining and Isolation

Individuals who test positive for COVID-19 should be isolated for 10 days, as is current practice. Contact tracing would also be done to determine close contacts.

Additional Mitigation Strategies

The extensive **ventilation** upgrade program performed last year was excellent according to the Medical Advisory Group. Ongoing inspection to ensure that the rigorous standards are continuing to be met is advised.

Hand hygiene with soap and water or hand sanitizer is always advisable as it helps to prevent spread of other respiratory viruses such as influenza.

The Medical Advisory Group is focusing on all of these measures which they have determined make **distancing** less important.

The Medical Advisory Group based their recommendations on the best data available at this moment with the understanding that as new information continues to emerge, regular review and possible changes will continue to be necessary.

The Medical Advisory Group members are:

- Dr. Brenda Anders Pring, Pediatrician, HHS Advisory Board, NPS parent

- Dr. Ashish Jha, Dean, Brown University School of Public Health, NPS parent
- Dr. Jodi Larson, Internal Medicine, Chief Quality and Experience Officer, Newton-Wellesley Hospital, NPS parent
- Dr. Sandy Nelson, Infectious Disease Specialist, Mass General Hospital
- Dr. Eric Rubin, Professor and Chair, Department of Immunology and Infectious Diseases, Harvard Chan School of Public Health
- Dr. Karen Sadler, Pediatrician, NPS School Physician
- Dr. Oneeka Williams, Urologic Surgeon, Assistant Clinical Professor of Urology at Tufts University School of Medicine
- Dr. Dori Zaleznik, Infectious Disease Specialist, former City of Newton Chief Administrative Officer, Health & Human Services Commissioner and School Committee member

Read their full recommendations to the School Committee [here](#).

The School Committee will discuss the specific ways to implement these recommendations and then vote on them at a special School Committee meeting next Tuesday, Aug. 24 at 7:30 p.m. Find the zoom link to “attend” this meeting [here](#).

A community webinar for the school community is planned for the next night, Wednesday, Aug. 25 at 7:30 p.m. Questions can be submitted prior to the meeting [here](#). Zoom into the webinar [here](#). Webinar ID: 894 9060 8033.

Stormy Thursday

We had quite a Thursday weatherwise. Here in Newton, we received just about 3 inches of rain in less than 3 hours.

The heavy rainfall led to flooding in a few areas, including a dramatic scene at Cheesecake Brook. A car driving along a flooded Albemarle Road floated into the brook and collided with a pedestrian bridge (the one nearest to the Gath Pool). Thankfully the driver managed to get out of the car safely through the sunroof, and while the bridge suffered significant damage (we’ve condemned it), no one was injured.

Police, Fire and DPW crews (and the lifeguard team from Gath Pool rushed over to be of help) were on the scene and the car was towed from the water.

DPW had already completed the final construction documents for a new, accessible bridge before yesterday's incident. Engineers were on site today to see if a temporary bridge can be installed while the new permanent one is built. They'll also do a final review of the plans so we can quickly go out to bid and expedite work to get the bridge built as soon as possible.



In the midst of the rain yesterday, the National Weather Service also issued a tornado warning coupled with warnings for flash flooding and severe thunderstorms. After a few tense moments, I think I speak for everyone in saying we are all relieved the tornado never materialized.

Tropical Storm Henri

On the heels of yesterday's storm, we're also keeping a close eye on the progress of Tropical Storm Henri which at this point does appear to be making its way toward the New England coast on Sunday/Monday and bringing with it high winds and heavy rain. I will be meeting with our Emergency Preparedness Team tomorrow morning as we continue to update our plans.

At a press conference today, Governor Baker announced that the MBTA will be operating on a reduced schedule Sunday for essential travel only, and there will be no D branch service on the Green Line.

Right now, there are some simple steps all of us can take to begin preparing. If you aren't signed up to receive Code Red alerts from the City, please see below and get signed up. Prepare for possible flooding, power outages and specialized medical needs. Secure loose items outdoors on your property as high winds are expected. As we've done so well for the last year and a half, check on your neighbors.

Code Red

Are you signed up for Code Red, the City of Newton's emergency notification communication system? Yesterday we sent out a Code Red Alert about the weather warnings by phone, email, text and TDD to more than 60,000 devices.

If you didn't receive the message, please take a moment to create an account [here](#).

If you did receive a message and would like to manage your preferences regarding how we communicate with you during an emergency, click [here](#).



Happy 100th Birthday, Helaine Meyers! If you see Helaine around Newton grabbing a Greek Salad at Bill's or having lunch at Season's 52, wish her a very Happy Birthday. You may remember Helaine from her more than four decade career in the fine china, crystal and silver service department at Bloomingdale's in Chestnut Hill. She retired only five years ago.

Red Hot Real Estate Market in Newton

Newton's real estate market is red hot, with both the number of homes sold and the prices continuing to rise. The good news is that people want to live here. The bad news is that you have to have really deep pockets to buy into Newton.

Newton's Assessor's Office pulled together information on single family sales. (This does not include two-families, three-families and condominiums.)

<u>House Sales in Newton</u>		
	<u>2020</u>	<u>Jan - July 2021</u>
Average Single Family Sale Price	\$1,480,386	\$1,733,724
Median Single Family Sales Price	\$1,296,500	\$1,500,000
# of Single Family Homes Sold	664	479
Average Sales per Month	55.33	68.43
%/# Selling for More than \$1M	69.58% (462)	80.38% (385)
%/# Selling for More than \$1.5M	39.46% (262)	50.31% (241)
%/# Selling for More than \$2M	17.32% (115)	26.51% (127)
%/# Selling for Less than \$700,000	4.67% (31)	1.88% (9)

More than one out of every four single family homes, or 127 houses, sold for more than \$2 million dollars in Newton so far in 2021. Last year, during all of 2020, there

were 115 sales of \$2 million dollars or more or 17% of total sales (with the previous high mark of 18% in 2019).

Over 80% of all single family sales were for \$1 million dollars thus far in 2021 (compared to 70% in all of 2020).

These are the highest average and median sales prices in Newton's history.

Only 9 single family homes sold for less than \$700,000 in Newton through July 2021 (or 2% of all sales). This compares to 31 homes for all of 2020 or 5% of all sales.

Statewide, home prices are more modest but also rising. Statewide, in July, single family prices rose 18% over last July 2020 with a median sales price of \$560,000.

Newton Police Selected for ABLE Training

We have good news: the Newton Police Department was just selected by Georgetown University's Innovative Policing Program to participate in their Active Bystandership for Law Enforcement (ABLE) Project training program.

The ABLE training supports within police departments active bystandership and the duty to intervene to prevent officers causing harm, misconduct, harmful behavior, and mistakes. The training prepares officers to intervene routinely and to create a culture that supports peer intervention. Importantly, the training also embraces the health and wellness of police officers. The training focuses on culture, policies, support systems and accountability.

Chief Carmichael and the Newton Police Department are fully committed to achieving the required ten ABLE standards: community support, meaningful training, dedicated coordination, program awareness, accountability, officer wellness, reporting, measuring officer perceptions, follow through, and paying it forward.

This idea to do ABLE training originated with the Newton Police Reform Task Force and both Chief Carmichael and I agreed wholeheartedly with the recommendation.

The Newton Police Department will be selecting three officers to attend the ABLE Project's multi-day train-the-trainer program. These officers will be certified as instructors and then train the entire department in active bystandership.

Three officers also completed Integrated Communications And Tactics (ICAT) training certification a few weeks ago. ICAT is the deescalation training which was also recommended by the NPRTF. ICAT coincides with ABLE, POST Deescalation standards, and CIT.

Thanks go to two community members who joined me in writing support letters for NPD to apply for the program – Michelle Luo, Co-Chair of the Chinese American Association of Newton (CAAN), and Devlin Scott, NewCity Church Reverend.

The Newton Police Department will join six Massachusetts departments, Lawrence, Arlington, Boston, Brookline, Chelsea and Northeastern University Police and 170

others across the United States and Canada, who have been selected to participate in this innovative training program.

Food Insecurity Awareness Week

One in ten households in the United States is food insecure. Here in Newton we have had lots of patrons at our food pantries and over 500,000 meals distributed in the City's Grab 'n Go program.



Next week, Aug. 22—28, is Newton's 1st Food Insecurity Awareness Week, a week of events to shine a light on this crisis. Together with NewCommunity and partners Newton Food Pantry and the Centre Street Food Pantry, Lasell University and Lasell Village, Newton Community Farm, and the Hyde Community Center, a wide range of activities for all ages are planned. Thanks go to The Village Bank for sponsoring these events.

Join us:

- *A Place at the Table*, a documentary that investigates hunger and proposes solutions. Sunday, Aug. 22, 7:30 p.m., at Newton City Hall (1000 Commonwealth Ave.) The event is free; please register [here](#).
- Tune in as Newton Community Farm's volunteer, Brian Rogan, teaches how to start a garden. The live audience for this is focused on older Newton residents and includes a group who are working together to plant a community garden at their senior housing. Monday, Aug. 23, 6:00 p.m., Register [here](#).
- Join us for a community meal. Wednesday, Aug. 25, 6:00 p.m., Hyde Community Center (90 Lincoln Road, Newton Highlands). Click [here](#) for more details.
- Family Fun Fair where youngsters will have a chance to go from station to station to see demos and participate in activities to learn about how children of all ages can fight food insecurity. Saturday, Aug. 28, 10:00 a.m., Newton City Hall. Register [here](#).

Spices make a meal, and for many ethnic groups, spices are a taste of home. Drop off spices at our Spice Drop Box at any event or at the Newton Food Pantry located at Newton City Hall.

Get more details about this weeklong event [here](#).

Warmly,

Ruthanne

P.S. The **Gath Pool** was temporarily closed at 4:00 p.m. today due to a mechanical issue with the pump. Our Aquatics staff recognized the declining functionality of the part and were able to order it ahead of time. We are now coordinating with our pool service provider to get it replaced as quickly as possible. We expect to have the repair done in time to reopen next week. Check the website here: <https://www.newtonma.gov/government/parks-recreation-culture/aquatics/gath-pool> for the latest info about when the pool will be up and running again.



P.P.S. Looking for a new way to exercise? The Newton Parks, Recreation and Culture Department is partnering with Charles River Aquatics to offer **Aquatic Aerobics, a great way to increase physical activity without stressing your joints.** It's also a great cardiovascular workout, conditions and stretches muscles, and you don't even need to know how to swim. Classes are held at Charles River Aquatics, 900 Worcester St., Wellesley, on Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:00 – 10:00 a.m. beginning Thursday, Sept. 16. Learn more [here](#).

P.P.P.S. Newton Neighbors is hosting a **School Supplies Drive** through next Friday, Aug. 27 to help local kids in need as they get ready for the school year. Consider donating new or gently used backpacks, graphing calculators, notebooks, pen, pencils or a \$25 gift card to Star Market. There are three easy drop-off locations: Legit Activewear, Oddfellows and Sukker & Sweet, all located at The Street, 33 Boylston St., Chestnut Hill. Learn more [here](#).

P.P.P.P.S. It's true, **Russo's** in Watertown is closing in October. We're going to miss them a lot.



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

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