

Thursday, Aug. 26, 2021

Mayor's Update

Mask Mandate

Today, Commissioner of Health and Human Services Deborah Youngblood and I are announcing a mask mandate for all indoor public spaces in Newton effective next Thursday, Sept. 2.



This mandate includes all indoor places where the public has access such as grocery stores and retailers, restaurants and bars, performance and event spaces and salons as well as social clubs and places of worship.

In food service establishments, customers may remove face coverings while seated and actively eating or drinking.

The requirement does not apply to those for whom a face covering creates a health risk or to children under the age of two.

We have learned that the most effective public health strategies build among community members an understanding of the science and the evidence which in turn leads to voluntary compliance.

Therefore, we as a City have been following a deliberate set of steps in line with the evolving data about the Delta variant and with the fall approaching.

On Aug. 5, as the Delta variant was taking hold, we issued a strong recommendation for people to wear masks inside public spaces in Newton.

Last week we took the lead as the City in requiring that masks be worn inside public spaces in municipal buildings.

On Tuesday, the Newton School Committee (on which I sit) unanimously voted to require universal mask wearing by all students and adults while inside the Newton Public Schools, regardless of vaccination status.

Next week, all of us will be wearing masks in public spaces indoors here in Newton. We know masks work.

Our goal is to have our community continue to work together to stop the spread of this persistent virus to youngsters who are not eligible to receive a vaccine and others who are immunocompromised or face other health challenges.

With the end of summer, circumstances are also changing. Residents are coming home from vacations, college students are moving back onto campuses, more than

12,500 students in our Newton Public Schools will start the school year on Sept. 9 with in-person learning, and the cooler weather will be arriving soon, moving people back inside.

We have also seen consistent bumps in positive cases after holiday weekends and therefore we are timing our mask mandate to go into effect before the Labor Day long weekend.

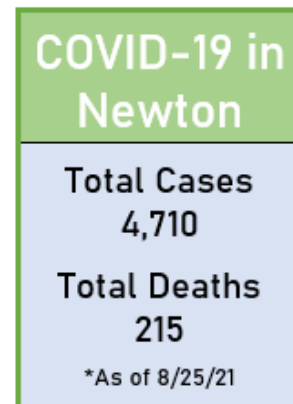
As the State has ended its Emergency Order, as a City we are following the same step that we did a week ago when we required masking in public buildings. We are giving everyone— including businesses—ample notice, including an official notice in the Newton Tab.

For brick and mortar locations, please click [here](#) for a sign that you can print and download to put on your entryways if you choose.

Current Cases

We had 60 confirmed new cases of COVID-19 over the past seven days in Newton from Aug. 19 – 25, bringing our cumulative total to 4,710. Through August, our number of cases has remained relatively steady, with 62 cases reported on Aug. 5, 57 on Aug. 12, and 48 last week.

Looking at a two-week period between Aug. 8 -25, there were 129 cases in Newton. Positive cases from Newton's institutions of higher education make up 11% of these 129 cases. Our public health staff anticipated some positive cases from these colleges and universities since every student returning to campus is being tested. The institutions are requiring all students, faculty and staff on campus to be vaccinated (including the Mt. Ida Campus of UMass Amherst).



The age breakdown for the 129 cases is:

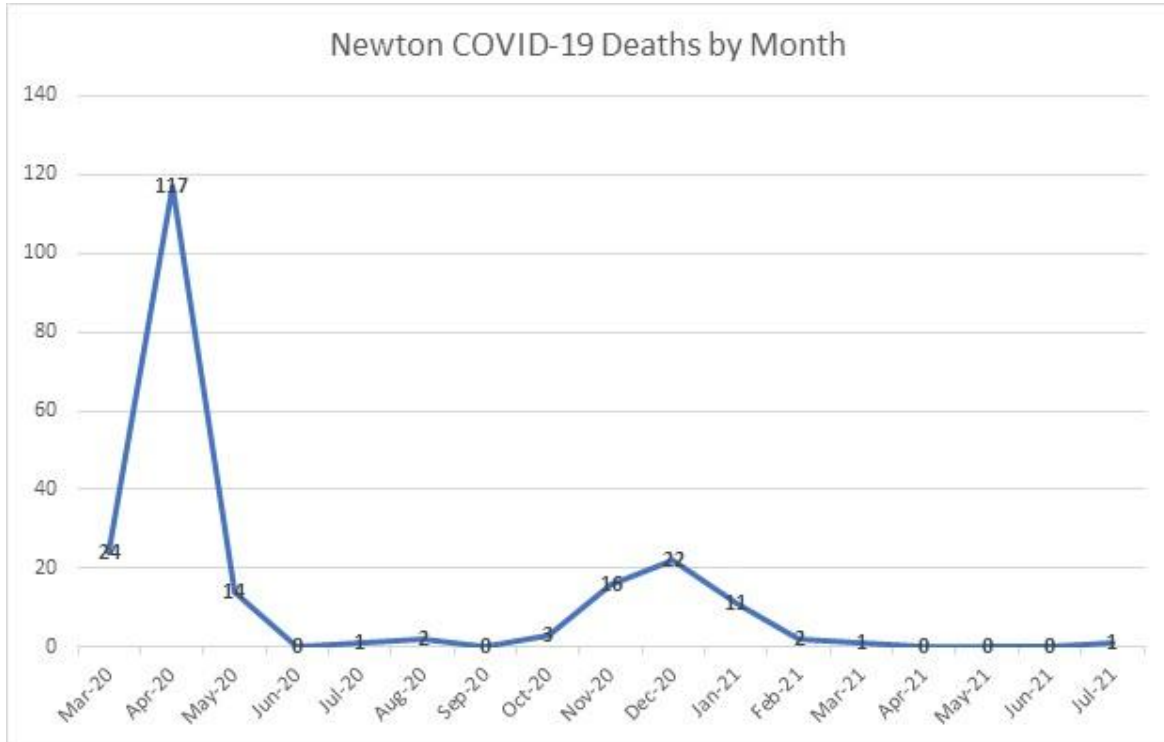
- 11% were under 12 years old
- 13% were between 12 and 19 years old
- 34% were between 20 and 39 years old
- 24% were between 40 and 59 years old
- 18% were 60 years or older

The average daily incidence rate in Newton (the average number of new cases per 100,000 people) is 7.6 for the period from Aug. 8 –21. This is down from 9.0 last week and 8.7 during the two weeks prior to that.

Newton's positivity rate (the percentage of positive cases among those tested over the past two weeks) also dipped this week, with 1% of the 12,108 tests performed coming back positive. This compares to 1.4% for the past two weeks.

Again, most importantly, I can report again this week that no one in Newton died with COVID-19 over the past week. The chart below shows that the vast number of our

215 family members, friends and neighbors in Newton who lost their lives with COVID-19 died early in the pandemic.



Newton-Wellesley Hospital

We are keeping in close contact with our partners at Newton-Wellesley Hospital.

This week there are 15 patients hospitalized with COVID-19, four of whom are in the Intensive Care Unit.

Vaccine Clinics

Evidence continues to show that the vaccines are highly effective at preventing infection, hospitalizations, and death.

Still not vaccinated?

We are hosting COVID-19 vaccine clinics in September and October for people 12 and older at two sites, Newton North and Newton South High Schools.

Newton North High School

Saturday, Sept. 11, 8:00 a.m. to noon

and

Saturday, Oct. 2, 8:00 a.m. to noon

Location: Cafeteria

Newton North Sign Up Link: <https://tinyurl.com/NEWTONNORTHVAX>

Newton South High School

Saturday, Sept. 11, 8:00 a.m. to noon

and
Saturday, Oct. 2, 8:00 a.m. to noon
Location: Gymnasium
Newton South Sign Up Link: <https://tinyurl.com/NEWTONSOUTHVAX>

Vaccines are also readily available at pharmacies (Keyes Drug in Auburndale, Union Pharmacy in Newton Centre, CVS and Walgreens), and other locations in Newton and across the state. Find a location at vaxfinder.mass.gov.

Testing

The evidence also shows the Delta variant is highly contagious and can be carried and spread by those of us who have been fully vaccinated. It's important to get tested if you have any of the [symptoms of COVID-19](#). Even if your symptoms are mild and you're fully vaccinated, let's all do our part and self-isolate until we get a negative test result. Find a testing location [here](#). (Please know CIC Health at Riverside decided to stay open for testing.)

Riverside Moving Forward

For close to a decade, the City Council has been reviewing 3 iterations of proposals to swap out the large parking lot and redo the MBTA station at the intersection of Grove Street, Rt. 95 and the Mass Pike for something better.

The revised proposal for the 13 acres off Grove Street in Lower Falls/Auburndale includes a total of 362,000 square feet of office/laboratory space, 22,000 square feet of ground floor commercial space, and 2,172 parking spaces.

On Tuesday night, the City Council's Land Use Committee voted unanimously to recommend approval of the revised plans. (Mark Development's plans were approved by unanimous votes of the City Council ten months ago in October 2020.)



The key change in this version is the replacement the approved new hotel at the site of the former Hotel Indigo with a life science building. (In the wake of the pandemic, hotel usage has plummeted; concurrently life sciences in the Boston area have grown exponentially.)

There are a couple of other notable changes:

- Another planned office building is being repurposed into a life science laboratory and research facility.

- The total number of housing units is decreasing from 582 to 550. Simultaneously, the number of permanently affordable units will increase from 103 to 110. (The increase is because we increased our City's inclusionary zoning ordinance requirement from 17.5% of the total units in a development to 20% as of Jan.1, 2021.) Despite fewer overall units, the project retains the same number of more deeply affordable units (44 units at 50% of the area median income (AMI), with another 44 units at 80% AMI and 22 units at 110% AMI).
- Anticipated traffic is reduced (the planned hotel and office building created more traffic than the life science buildings).
- An increased commitment to sustainability, moving the entire project from LEED Silver to LEED Gold and the three residential buildings meeting passive house certification.
- Additional funding to support the community—\$3.02 million for neighborhood improvements (a \$1.52 million increase from the previously approved project). The previously approved funding remains for a new total of \$8.92 million: \$1.5 million for Williams Elementary School improvements (just down the street from the project), \$3 million for the Riverside-Charles River trail network, and \$1.4 million to upgrade Newton's sewer system.

Unchanged from the October 2020 plans, Mark Development will build a new exit ramp from I-95 northbound, providing direct access into the project. The developer will also construct a new roundabout at the intersection of the exit ramp from I-95 southbound at Grove Street, and a lane will be added to Recreation Road to allow two-way traffic. The developer will build a 10-foot, two-way protected bicycle track from the Riverside site across I-95 to the Lower Falls Community Center.

Also unchanged is an investment in upgrading the MBTA facilities.

The first phase of the project, which includes the parking garage, is scheduled to break ground by the end of next year, 2022.

Kudos to so many people for persisting and bringing together a great project for Newton. Involved residents spoke up and advocated for years and all of us listened. Newton's Planning and Law Departments provided analysis and advice all along the way. City Councilors, especially those from Ward 4 and from the Land Use Committee (chaired by City Council Vice President Rick Lipof), considered every detail and insisted on changes. The developer, Mark Development, kept revising the plans to meet the needs of the neighborhood and provide a range of housing types and price points right next to public transit, a transportation and bike plan that works, major investments on the trails next door, and energy efficient buildings. Nice work everyone.

What's next? The full City Council is scheduled to vote on the amended plans at its meeting on Thursday, Sept. 9.

Oh Rats

It's summer, people are out and about in our City, and so are rodents, including rats.

While the numbers of rat sightings are not up this year in Newton, there's no doubt they are out there, and we take it seriously. (Want to report a sighting? Click [here](#).)

We have learned that discouraging rodents from living in our City is most successful as a community effort.

Our Health and Human Services Department (HHS) works with residents, business owners and other City departments to better understand rat behavior and teach us how to minimize their presence and impact on the community. Click [here](#) for more information. (Some of the tips include picking up pet feces and cleaning up spilled birdseed, tightly closing trash containers, keeping grills clean, maintaining/covering compost piles, and covering openings greater than a ½ inch in diameter so they don't have a place to live.)

In addition, HHS inspectors have conducted 133 site assessments so far this calendar year and have been quite successful in working with homeowners and businesses to complete remedial actions.

The Public Buildings and School Departments assess city owned buildings for pest issues, taking pest control steps as needed. We use the special permit process by the City Council to require developers to have a rodent remediation plan when appropriate.

We pulled together staff from across our Departments to look for new and expanded rodent control efforts to compliment the ongoing site inspections, assessments, public outreach, and actions of our Health & Human Services Department.

These multipronged initiatives focus on prevention, correction, and enforcement measures.

- Newton's Inspectional Services Department will implement immediately a new policy requiring rodent control services for every full property demolition permit, including "by-right" projects.
- Newton's Planning & Development Department will implement a new policy to recommend to the City Council routinely and consistently on all special permit projects involving excavation that rodent control services be provided as a condition of approval and embedded in the Construction Management Plan. (This has historically been required only on larger projects.)
- The City of Newton will implement an environmentally-sensitive rodent control program on City properties in areas experiencing issues.
- The City of Newton will be contacting the owners and contractors of all currently active demolition or construction sites involving excavation with information on rodent control best practices and resources.

- The City of Newton will provide rodent control advisory documents each time someone applies for a building permit.
- The City of Newton will explore a rodent control financial assistance program/ service for residents with lower resources.
- The City of Newton will collaborate with the City Council on analyzing additional ways to strengthen and expand actions allowed under state laws to better enforce rodent control actions.

Thanks go, in particular, to City Council President Albright and Ward 1 City Councilors Maria Greenberg, Alison Leary, and John Oliver for their help on this challenging issue. We will be working closely with them as we look for additional effective strategies and/or changes to city ordinances and special permit conditions.

LGBTQ+ Liaison

Starting the day I was sworn in as Mayor, I established for the first time in Newton's history a Director of Community Engagement and Inclusion.

As the Director of Community Engagement and Inclusion, Hattie Kerwin Derrick, is charged with bolstering civic and community engagement and diversity, equity and inclusion. Her work includes facilitating relationships with and giving voice to residents, communities and groups across the City. She is available to everyone and tries especially hard to reach out to traditionally underrepresented people whether BIPOC, ethnic or religious minorities, persons with disabilities or anyone in need of assistance or support.



This support has also been given to our LGBTQ+ community. We have formalized this, and Hattie will be officially taking on the role of LGBTQ+ Liaison. (Thanks go to City Councilor Holly Ryan who served in this role and continues to support Hattie and our active LGBTQ+ community.) In this capacity, Hattie will be the “go to” person for residents as well as serve as the point person with our Police, Schools, City departments, businesses and non-profits.

Hattie will continue to help all Newton residents, people doing business in Newton and anyone who needs resources or support.

As Mayor, I am grateful to have Hattie (and before her, Dana Hanson) in the office right next to mine. I am committed to ensuring we work collaboratively to institutionalize equity and social justice, reinforce inclusion, affirm diverse identities and experiences, support victims of hate and bias, foster respect among all of us

and celebrate differences as this is essential to our shared goal of being a welcoming community where everyone can thrive for all.

Hattie can be reached at LGBTQPLUSliaison@newtonma.gov or hkerwinderrick@newtonma.gov.

Warmly,

Ruthanne



P.S. A wonderful afternoon in Auburndale yesterday visiting special merchants Sheelah McNamara at The Dressing Room, Morgan Van Wickler and Amy Shih at Just Next Door, and restaurateurs Mario Boccabella at bocca bella cafe & bistro and Walter Devine at Ward 4. Join me in **Auburndale shopping local and enjoying live music at the sidewalk sale** this Saturday, Aug. 28, from 10 a.m. to noon.

P.P.S. Calling all **dog families** who enjoy **Hunnewell Park**, 183-191 Newton Street in Newton Corner near the Brighton line. The Friends of Hunnewell Dog Park is coming together this Saturday, Aug. 28 at 11:00 a.m. for a community clean up as a thank you to the City of Newton for improvements at the off-leash area. The Parks, Recreation and Culture Department is providing trash bags and disposable gloves. I'll be there with my pointer, Argus. (Give your dog an extra pat on the head: It's National Dog Day today.)

P.P.P.S. Interested in e-bikes? Check out the **Electric Bike Expo**, Tuesday, Aug. 31, at the Newton Farmers' Market at Cold Spring Park from 1:30 to 6:00 p.m. Vendors will be on site with electric bike models, including cargo e-bikes. Newton Energy Coach Liora Silkes, members of the Newton EV Task Force, Green Newton and experienced e-bike owners will also be on hand to answer questions. Don't forget to bring your helmet!



P.P.P.S. Want your event posted on the **Newton Arts Calendar**? Our Cultural Development Department summer intern Jacqueline Scholl couldn't head back to college without making one last video to show how easy it is to post your event. (Good luck and thank you Jackie as you return to the Acting program at Pace University.)



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