

Thursday, Oct. 7, 2021

## Mayor's Update

### Answers from Dr. Ashish Jha on COVID-19

Do you have questions about what's ahead with COVID-19, the Delta variant or vaccines? Dr. Ashish Jha will join me on NewTV to answer questions this Tuesday, Oct. 12.

Dr. Jha, a physician, health policy researcher and Dean of the Brown University School of Public Health is a neighbor here in Newton and a member of our school Medical Advisory Group.



We will be taking your questions during a live broadcast on NewTV, and we're 99% sure it will be from 7:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Call in questions to 617-965-7200 throughout the program. The program will be broadcast on NewTV's Educational Channels (• Comcast 99 • RCN 3, 629 (HD) • Verizon 32) and will be streaming live [here](#).

### Current Cases

Newton had 79 confirmed new cases of COVID-19 over the past six days from Sept. 29 to Oct. 5. Over the previous week we had 78 cases. Our cumulative total in Newton is now 5,201.

This virus is continuing to take a heavy toll on our community. Over the past seven days, two more Newtonians died with COVID-19. We have now lost 219 of our neighbors over the course of this deadly pandemic.

COVID-19 in Newton
Total Cases 5,201
Total Deaths 219
<small>*As of 10/5/21</small>

The average daily incident rate in Newton (the number of cases per 100,000 population) is 11.5 over the two-week State tracking period from Sept. 19 through Oct. 2, essentially level from the 11.8 reported last week.

Our positivity rate has also plateaued. This week's State data over the two-week reporting period shows 0.6% of the 29,320 tests performed on Newton residents came back positive. Last week's positivity rate in Newton was 0.7% (with 838 fewer tests performed) and it was 0.6% during the previous two weeks (with 2,591 fewer tests performed).

There were 148 confirmed cases in Newton over this two-week tracking period, a decrease of three cases from the 151 reported last week. Of these 148 people who

tested positive, 27% were students at one of Newton's institutions of higher education compared to 36% last week.

The ages of the 151 people who tested positive in Newton between Sept. 19 to Oct. 2 are:

- 17% were under 12 years old
- 13% were between 12 and 19 years old
- 38% were between 20 and 39 years old
- 22% were between 40 and 59 years old
- 8% were between 60 and 79 years old
- 2% were 80 years or older

Newton-Wellesley Hospital (NWH) reported on Tuesday, Oct. 5, that eight patients were hospitalized with COVID-19, one of whom is in the intensive care unit. Last week, there were nine patients with COVID-19 at NWH, one of whom was in the ICU.

### Mask Mandate

At the end of August, Health and Human Services Commissioner Deb Youngblood and I announced a mask mandate for all indoor public spaces in Newton. It is still in effect.

The mandate includes all indoor places where the public has access such as grocery stores and retailers, restaurants and bars (unless when eating or drinking), performance and event spaces and salons as well as social clubs and places of worship.

The requirement does not apply to those for whom a face covering creates a health risk or for children under the age of 2.

What can you do if you notice an establishment where no one is following the mask mandate? Email our Health and Human Services team at [covidcompliance@newtonma.gov](mailto:covidcompliance@newtonma.gov) with the location, date and time and they will follow up with the establishment.

Our goal, then and now, is to have our community work together to stop the spread of this persistent and incredibly contagious Delta variant, especially to children not yet able to be vaccinated and others who are immunocompromised or who may have other health challenges.

Our layers of prevention along with Newton's high percentage of fully vaccinated residents and mask wearing are helping to keep our cases from climbing.

So, how long will the mask requirement last? We can ask Dr. Jha next week for his input.

We're looking ahead to when we might be able to lift the mandate. Some of the things we are considering are: the transmission of COVID in Middlesex County and

whether it remains substantial or high, the level of transmission in Newton, and the availability of vaccines for our youngsters.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends everyone continue wearing masks in public, indoor settings when their county risk level is in the high or substantial transmission category. As of today, Middlesex County, where Newton is located, is in the substantial transmission category, as is our neighboring Norfolk County, while Suffolk which includes Boston is in the high category.

More information is available at [CDC.gov/Counties](https://www.cdc.gov/counties).

### Newton Public School COVID-19 Data

There have been a total of 54 cases of COVID-19 in the Newton Public Schools (44 students, 10 staff) reported to the Health and Human Services Department from Sept. 2 through yesterday, Oct. 6. This includes the 12 students and two staff members who tested positive this past week.

Find a data dashboard tracking COVID-19 cases in the Newton Public Schools each week [here](#) and [here](#).

### Vaccines and Boosters

Still not vaccinated? Looking for a booster?

Find more information about vaccine sites in Newton, as well as information translated into Chinese, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish [here](#). Find information on getting an in-home vaccine [here](#).

### **Check Out and Weigh In on MBTA Commuter Rail Station Plans**

Check out and weigh in on what Newton's new, fully accessible MBTA commuter rail stations in Auburndale, West Newton and Newtonville will look like and how they will function. The MBTA Newton Commuter Rail Stations Accessibility Project team will present the 30% designs to improve frequency, reliability, condition and accessibility at a virtual public meeting on Wednesday, Oct. 13 at 6:00 p.m.

Finally, the MBTA is addressing the significant design flaws so residents, employees and visitors will have frequent, accessible rail service from all three stations, each such an important part of these village centers and the surrounding neighborhoods.

At a meeting I helped organize between Newton elected officials and MBTA leadership, MassDOT Secretary Jamey Tesler and MBTA General Manager Steve Poftak committed to funding the 30% design to be unveiled for the public next Wednesday.



Secretary Tesler and General Manager Poftak also committed to funding the 100% design, which puts the new stations in line for full construction funding.

We still have a long way to go, but we finally have real progress. The MBTA is indicating that construction on all three rail stations could be completed in seven years. (Accessible platforms on the northside of the tracks at all three stations

could be completed even sooner.)

The work will include constructing two fully accessible, high-level side platforms at each station with elevators and accessible pathways to each platform from the adjacent sidewalk and parking areas.

Kudos to State Rep. Kay Khan, in particular, for her persistence over two decades, Senator Cindy Creem, President of the Council Susan Albright, Councilor Emily Norton, and U.S. Representative Jake Auchincloss (with a shout out to State Reps. Balser and Lawn).

Register [here](#) to join us at Wednesday's meeting to see the designs, learn more about the MBTA's plans, and get questions answered.

Learn more about the projects [here](#), and sign up for email updates [here](#). (The MBTA will make the designs available online next Tuesday.)

*We had a good day in the City of Newton as we broke ground on the Newton Housing Authority's Haywood House, 55 units of affordable housing for seniors named in honor of Rev. Howard Haywood. Rev. Haywood fiercely advocated for making his beloved City of Newton more welcoming, accessible and inclusive, including 10 years as a Commissioner of the Newton Housing Authority. The new Newton Housing Authority addition, a result of a City, State and Federal partnership, is going up at JFK Circle in Nonantum, across from the*



*new home of the Lincoln Eliot Elementary School and a new park.*

*(Photo: With Katy Haywood at this morning's groundbreaking)*

## **ARPA: Emergency Housing & Utility Relief for Newton Residents**

I am allocating \$1 million of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to launch a new emergency housing & utility assistance program as a short-term stop gap for those Newton households that continue to struggle with the economic effects of COVID-19.

This program will help address the immediate needs of our neighbors who are struggling to keep up with ongoing, basic housing and utility costs.

While our community members have seen many improvements over the past few months, the pandemic continues to impact our most vulnerable. In late August, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the CDC's eviction moratorium, removing a critical protection that has helped families and individuals be safely housed over the past eighteen months. In early September, the extended unemployment assistance ended for more than 7.5 million Americans which provided income for those who lost their jobs or became underemployed during the pandemic. As the Delta variant continues to plague our economy in different ways, we know that our lowest-income residents have been hardhit.

The City of Newton's Emergency Housing Relief Program supported more than 250 households between July 2020 and August 2021 with emergency housing assistance payments. The program provided up to 70% of an eligible household's monthly rent or mortgage (for those homeowners that reside in deed-restricted affordable units). Using our federal Community Development Block Grant CARES Act (CDBG-CV) and Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds, the program awarded more than \$2.8 million in direct financial assistance to these Newton households, all of whom had been financially impacted by the pandemic. Administered by Metro West Collaborative Development, our local nonprofit partner, this critical program was a lifeline for Newton families and individuals.

When we made the decision to wind down the program in the spring, the horizon looked brighter and we were hopeful that households still in need of assistance would easily and quickly transition to the state programs.

Our Health & Human Services and Planning staff have been closely monitoring the situation on the ground, hearing directly from those most affected by the economic effects of the crisis as well as the nonprofit agencies that provide support services to these families and individuals.

Following continued reports of low-income Newton households still struggling to pay their rent and meet other basic needs, I made the important decision to launch this new Emergency Housing & Utility Relief Program to provide a much-needed bridge of financial support for impacted residents as they continue to seek assistance from the Commonwealth's RAFT, ERMA, and ERAP programs, as well as other available resources.

The new program will be a partnership of the City’s Health and Human Services and Planning Departments, along with our community partner Metro West Collaborative Development, who administered our initial emergency housing relief program over the past year. Metro West is able to quickly mobilize to provide eligible households with housing assistance, as well as utility assistance for those households with overdue notices.

Our Health and Social Services staff will work hand-in-hand with Metro West to ensure that program participants are concurrently working to access other available resources that meet their immediate needs related to housing stability and other support services. Newton’s Social Services staff will provide individual case management to program participants, helping them navigate housing assistance, and also SNAP, food pantry referrals, fuel assistance, utility discounts, and other local and state resources.

The City’s new COVID-19 Emergency Housing & Utility Relief Program will provide eligible households with up to two months of rental or mortgage assistance – with possible extensions – and up to \$700 of utility assistance, with proof of an overdue notice from the utility company (heat, hot water, or electricity). The program will cover 70% of a household’s monthly rent or mortgage payment, with a maximum monthly assistance amount of \$2,500 per household. For homeowners, those that reside in a deed-restricted affordable ownership unit are eligible to receive mortgage assistance.

Here are a few more of the important details about the program. To be eligible to receive assistance, households must currently live in Newton, have had a negative economic impact caused by COVID-19 (and can demonstrate this financial hardship), and have a total household income at or below 80% of the area median income (AMI) at the time of application and/or recertification to the program. Household income needs to be within the following limits:

Household size	1 person	2 person	3 person	4 person	5 person	6 person
Income Limit 80% of area median	\$70,750	\$80,850	\$90,950	\$101,050	\$109,150	\$117,250

Applicants need to complete an online application. To begin the process, applicants should contact Metro West Collaborative Development, which is administering the program on behalf of the City. Contact Robyn Rufo at: [robyn@metrowestcd.org](mailto:robyn@metrowestcd.org) (preferred method) or at 857-999-6532.

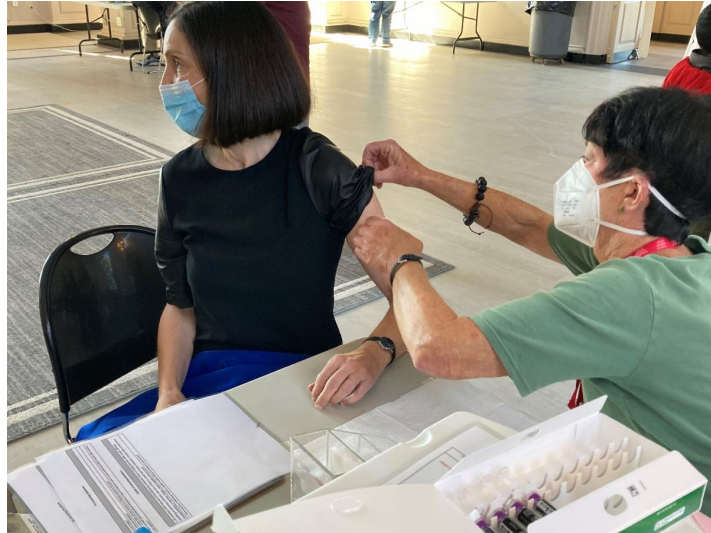
The program flyer is available for download in:

- Chinese [简体中文](#)
- Portuguese [português](#)
- Russian [русский](#)
- Spanish [español](#)

Free language assistance is available to households with limited English proficiency. Assistance with the submission of the application is also available to those with

limited computer access.

*I got my flu shot today at City Hall. Thanks go to nurse Darlene Oddo for making it painless. Newton's Health and Human Services staff are holding additional community flu clinics at City Hall on Thursday, Oct. 21 (4:00 – 6:00 p.m.) and Monday, Nov. 8 (4:00 – 6:00 p.m.). Sign up if possible but walk-ins welcome; find more info [here](#).*



## **Newton Bluebikes Turns One**

Newton Bluebikes has been setting ridership records.

More than 1,000 of us hopped on a Bluebike in Newton during both August and September. (Regionally, the system saw 400,000 trips in September alone, as compared with 500,000 trips in its first full year.)



Newton's network has now grown to 15 stations (see the list below). Any idea which one is the most popular and how many rides originated from that station during September? We'll let you know the answer next week!

We need help deciding on new station locations. Let us know where you want to see more bike share stations and how your experience has been with Bluebikes.

Send answers, requests and comments to Newton's Director of Transportation Planning Nicole Freedman, [NFreedman@newtonma.gov](mailto:NFreedman@newtonma.gov).

Bluebikes are currently available in:

- Auburndale Square
- Bacon Street at Washington Street in Newton Corner
- Beacon Street at Walnut Street in Newton Centre (Four Corners)
- Boston College T Station
- California Street at Chapel Street in Nonantum
- Centre Street at Washington Street in Newton Corner
- Langley Parking Lot in Newton Centre

- Newton Highlands T Station
- Newton Free Library
- Former Nonantum Library
- Union Street at Herrick Road in Newton Centre
- Washington Street at Crafts Street by Whole Foods
- Washington Street at Walnut Street in Newtonville
- West Newton Square
- West Newton Armory

## Paddy's Road Race

One of my favorite days of the year in Newton is that Sunday in October when the O'Hara family and Newton Athletes Unlimited come together for a few hours of exercise, camaraderie, community, food, drinks and fun.



The day raises “game changing” funding for Athletes Unlimited and its exceptional recreational programs for children and adults with disabilities.

With the help of Newton’s Parks, Recreation and Culture caring staff, Athletes Unlimited builds friendships, nourishes social, emotional and intellectual development, expands independence, and improves life for everyone involved.

Athletes Unlimited Newton really is extraordinary.

This year’s 20th Annual Paddy’s Road Race is on Sunday, Oct. 17. There are a 3M, a 1K and All Abilities Race, and Youth Field Races. Participate in person or virtually in any number of divisions for all ages and all abilities.

Register online here until next Wednesday, Oct. 13 or sign up in person on race weekend from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. on Saturday, Oct. 16 at Paddy’s Public House on Elm Street in West Newton and on race day starting at 9:30 a.m. Stick around after the race for pot-pie, hotdogs, fried dough and so much more.

Find more information about the race [here](#), and more information about Athletes Unlimited [here](#).

See you there.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

**P.S. Newton’s Harvest Fair** is back the weekend of



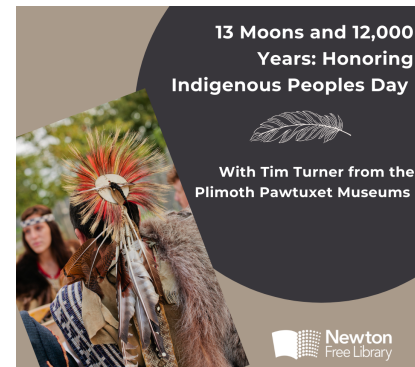


Oct. 16 and 17. Enjoy the kiddie rides on both days and Sunday's full open air market. More than 125 vendors and crafters will fill the Newton Centre Green and Langley Road on Sunday. Take home unique specialty items for the holidays, enjoy a takeout meal from a Newton Centre restaurant on one of the Newton Al Fresco picnic tables, and check out Green Newton's **2021 GreenExpo** (solar energy, electric cars, clean cosmetics, and other options to green your life) while listening to live music at either of the two performance stages. Curious about how much space 800 pumpkins require? Check out the Wegman's

free pumpkin decorating booth and see for yourself. The fair is open both days from 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

P.P.S. The City is once again fielding a team of marathon runners who raise money for non-profits doing good work in Newton and beyond. All the runners and charities have a connection with our City. Read about these amazing runners and good organizations on **Team Newton** [here](#).

P.P.P.S. The Newton Free Library is offering two programs in conjunction with **Indigenous Peoples Day** in Newton. Join Indigenous Educator Tim Turner of the Plimoth Pawtuxet Museums for a conversation that explores 12,000 years of Wampanoag history on Tuesday, Oct. 12 at 7:30 p.m. Register [here](#). Next, join presenter Gabriel Piemonte for a discussion of *Un Nuovo Momento: Reframing Columbus by Reclaiming our Italian Past* on Thursday, Oct, 21 at 7:00 p.m. Learn more [here](#).



P.P.P.P.S. Remember the **Boston Marathon** is on Monday. It turns out mailboxes and ballot drop boxes at City Hall will not be locked at City Hall after all.

P.P.P.P.P.S. Head to the Resource Recovery Center by **October 30, the last day of the season for the Swap Shop** on Rumford Avenue when our volunteer-run program closes through March. The Swap Shop is open on Fridays and Saturdays from 7:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. This is weather dependent. Questions? Click [here](#).



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