

Mayor's Update



We had 123 confirmed cases of COVID-19 over the past seven days from Oct. 14 to 20, an increase of 41 over the previous seven days. This is a noticeable increase from the positive case numbers we had been seeing in Newton over the previous three weeks. For example, our cases increased last week by 3 from the previous week, by 4 the week before that and by 1 prior to that. Newton's cumulative total of people with COVID since the pandemic began is now 5,406.

Our Health and Human Services staff is paying close attention to this increase. While it's often difficult to identify the exact source of exposure, we do know some of these cases are associated with household groups, travel and a few clusters of cases linked to social gatherings.

Here are some tips from the CDC for protecting yourself and your loved ones if you are [traveling domestically](#), [traveling internationally](#), or [planning a gathering](#).

The average daily incident rate in Newton over the State's two-week tracking period from Oct 3 - 16 is 15.9, up from 13.1 during the previous two weeks.

Our positivity rate also ticked up. This week the number of positive tests among the 27,067 tests conducted on Newton residents is 0.9%. Our positivity rate was 0.7% last week (with 28,885 tests performed). The statewide positivity rate this week is 1.8%.

Thankfully, no one in Newton died with COVID-19 again this week.

Over the two-week tracking period that the state uses, there were 204 confirmed cases in Newton. This is an increase of 34 cases from the 168 reported last week. Of these 204 people who tested positive between Oct. 3 and 16, just 8% were students at one of Newton's institutions of higher education compared to 16% during the previous two week tracking period.

The ages of the 204 people who tested positive in Newton during this tracking period are:

- 17% were under 12 years old
- 14% were between 12 and 19 years old
- 18% were between 20 and 39 years old
- 32% were between 40 and 59 years old

COVID-19 in Newton	
Total Cases	5,406
Total Deaths	219
*As of 10/20/21	

- 16% were between 60 and 79 years old
- 3% were 80 years or older

As of Tuesday, Oct. 19, Newton-Wellesley Hospital is caring for a total of five (5) patients with COVID-19, one of whom is in the Intensive Care Unit. Over the past month, the number of critically ill patients with COVID-19 has remained stable.

Newton Public School COVID-19 Data

There has been a total of 104 cases of COVID-19 in the Newton Public Schools reported to the Health and Human Services Department since school began on Sept. 2. This includes the 15 students who tested positive between Oct. 14 and 20. (As a reminder, when looking at NPS data, sometimes cases are added to previous weeks based on tests as they are reported/confirmed.) Thus, the cases in the Newton Public Schools are holding steady.

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

COVID-19 Vaccine

Many of us are closer to getting COVID-19 vaccine booster shots as the FDA and CDC just expanded approval to Moderna and Johnson & Johnson. They also approved a “mix and match” vaccine option for booster shots, allowing a different vaccine for the extra dose than the one or ones first received.

Read CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky's statement on boosters [here](#).

It looks hopeful that vaccines for children ages 5 to 11 could get FDA and CDC approval by Nov. 3. We'll have City of Newton vaccine clinics for this age group once the vaccines are approved.

MassNotify

MassNotify is a tool developed by the State to help in our fight against the spread of COVID-19.




It works through smartphones to alert users who may have been exposed to COVID-19. If you opt in, your smartphone will share anonymous codes with other MassNotify users using your phone's Bluetooth system. If another user you've been near tests positive for COVID-19 within a 14-day period, you will be notified. If you test positive, you can anonymously notify others to stop the spread of COVID-19.

Visit the [state website](#) to learn more and for instructions on enabling MassNotify on your phone.

COVID-19 and the Flu

You have a cough. Your head is starting to hurt or you feel like you may be coming down with a fever. Is it COVID-19? The flu? Another winter cold?

COVID-19 vs Flu

	COVID-19	Flu
 Common	Fever/chills	✓
	Cough	✓
	Body Aches/Headache	✓
	Tiredness	✓
 Less Common	Loss of taste/smell	✗
	Runny/stuffy nose	⊖
	Sore throat	⊖
	Shortness of breath	⊖
 Not Common	Severity	Varies. Older adults and people with certain underlying conditions are at higher risk of severe illness. Seems to cause more severe illness in more people than flu.
	Onset of symptoms	Later (2-14 days after infection)
	Cause	SARS-CoV-2
		Varies. Young children, older adults, and people with certain chronic conditions are at higher risk of severe illness.
		Earlier (1-4 days after infection)
		Influenza viruses



cdc.gov/coronavirus

CS326630-AG 9/29/2021

Because some of the symptoms of flu, COVID-19, and other respiratory illnesses are similar, you can't tell which one you have based on symptoms alone. The important thing is to get a COVID test if you have any of the symptoms, even if you don't think you've been exposed.

You can find a nearby test site at mass.gov/gettested.

Need a flu shot?

The City of Newton is hosting another free community flu vaccine clinic on Monday Nov. 8 from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. in the War Memorial Auditorium (in the rear of City Hall on the second floor, 1000 Commonwealth Ave.) Click [here](#) for more information about this clinic as well as a list of other locations around Newton to get your flu vaccine.

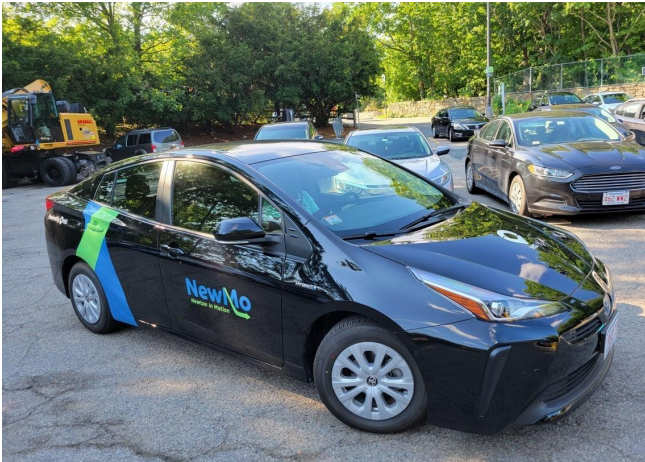
For \$2, Anyone, Anywhere Can Get A Ride to Any Place in Newton

Starting this Monday, Oct. 25, NewMo is expanding so anyone, anywhere in the City, can get a ride to any place in Newton they need to go.

Three new improvements will make this expanded Newton in Motion, or NewMo, service a gamechanger for many of us:

- Anyone 13 and older can now take a ride anywhere in Newton (with no service area restrictions).
- Service will now begin at 7:00 a.m. (instead of 7:30) and will run through 6:30 p.m. for the commuter service. Take note teachers and middle and high school students - you now have a new way to get to school and to afternoon activities. (Riders 13 to 17-years old can ride alone with adult consent; those under 13 need to be accompanied by an adult).

- All fares for all riders, seniors and commuters, are now just \$2. (Discounted \$.50 rides are still available for qualified low-income riders by contacting Nicole Freedman, Nfreedman@newtonma.gov. All seniors now riding at discounted rates below \$2 will automatically continue at that rate.)



We want you to love NewMo. To prepare for this expansion and ensure the system gets you where you need to go, we have increased the number of drivers and vehicles on the road and have brought on a dedicated customer service team to assist you.

Please bear with us during the first few days of the new service in case we have unexpected hiccups.

Remember that NewMo is a new version of public transportation; the on-demand, shared system just looks a little different than traditional public transportation. Our goal is to provide you reliable, on-demand, shared trips with average wait times of less than 30 minutes, although occasionally they may be more.

Since NewMo is public transportation, expect to share your ride with others, meaning your vehicle is likely to deviate from your shortest route to pick up or drop off other customers. Those not signed up as a senior may also be asked to walk up to a few blocks to meet your ride. (Seniors, your rides are always door-to-door.)

Seniors (those 60 and older who sign up specifically for the Senior Service) – your service is getting better also. Your full fare has been reduced to \$2 for all trips, and you can now pre-book for all medical appointments by calling the call center before 5:00 p.m. the night before at 617-655-8019. For seniors currently paying a reduced rate below \$2, your rate will not change. Seniors will still receive door-to-door service and service on weekends 9:00 a.m. to noon and can continue to take NewMo to medical appointments at designated locations outside of Newton. As always, seniors have the option to book trips by phone by contacting customer service at 617-655-8019 or via the app.

Sign Up for NewMo

Signing up for NewMo is simple. Download the NewMo app (search for NewMo Newton) on a smartphone or call 617-655-8019 to get started. Those without access to a smartphone can both sign-up and book a ride by calling 617-655-8019. Seniors over 60, we typically recommend you sign up for the senior service to ensure door-to-door service. To register for the senior service, start by contacting Newton's Senior Center at 617-796-1665 or Elizabeth Lund at Elund@newtonma.gov.

Also, consider signing up to be a driver. It might be perfect if you are looking for flexible work hours as an independent contractor. Earn \$29-\$37 per hour and a \$300

new driver promotion. Apply [online](#) or contact sriram@ridewithvia.com with questions.

Are you an employer and want to help your employees get to and from public transit to work? NewMo is offering businesses and organizations the option to cover the cost of rides for their members. To get started, head to the NewMo website at newton.gov/newmo and complete the *organization sign up form*.

For more information or to see if you qualify for a discounted fare, contact Nicole Freedman, Director of Transportation Planning, NFreedman@newtonma.gov, 617-879-8148. For questions about the senior service, contact Newton's Senior Center at 617-796-1665 or Elizabeth Lund at Elund@newtonma.gov.

Watch for pedestrians using the three new "Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons" or RRFBs in Newton Centre. The solar powered lights are at 3 crosswalks, one on Centre Street and two on Beacon Street. The pedestrian activated flashing lights help drivers see people in the crosswalks sooner and make crossing busy streets safer. We now have 16 RRFBs in Newton.



ARPA: Investing in Neighborhood Parks & Gardens (\$300,000)

Newtonians enjoy our many beautiful parks, green spaces and gardens throughout our villages. As we stayed closer to home and got outside for walks, runs and bike rides during the pandemic, our appreciation of these spaces increased, and made it even more apparent that we need more investments.

With these spaces providing community, tranquility and health, I'm allocating \$300,000 in ARPA funds for our Parks, Recreation and Culture staff (PRC) and residents to explore the possibility of a community garden at Spears Park and to supplement neighborhood-funded park projects in village centers and pocket parks, as well as within traffic islands. These funds will be used toward smaller-scale park improvements as well as bike racks, benches, waste receptacles, and signage.

PRC regularly works with an amazing group of volunteers. Businesses, community groups, and individuals volunteer and/or help provide financial support for the refurbishment and upkeep of Newton's many green spaces. Our neighbors are often creating plantings in traffic islands in roadway intersections, sidewalk garden beds, seating areas in village centers and around public buildings, and spearheading the

work in smaller neighborhood parks. ARPA funds will be used to help supplement neighborhood-raised monies for these types of projects.

Spears Park, a small quarter acre green space, is along Washington Street at Walnut Park, near the Jackson School, in Nonantum. Thanks go to Ward Councilor Maria Scibelli Greenberg from Ward 1 who advocated for a community garden there.

The study for Spears Park will examine options for a community garden with the goal of creating a public space that not only provides gardening opportunities but also adds beauty. The study will explore the projected size of the garden area and plots, accessibility, transit options, perimeter fencing and water, noise/light/ rodent considerations, and management and maintenance requirements.

A community garden in Nonantum would help balance availability across the City as our established garden is in Nahanton Park which sits in the southwest corner of Newton.

Interested in helping explore Spears Park or for information about the community garden at Nahanton Park or how to apply for funding for your favorite neighborhood park? Email our team at parks@newtonma.gov.

ARPA: Newton Highlands Village Center Project (\$250,000)

Newton has wonderful village centers that serve as centers of business, public transportation, shopping and dining, a variety of housing types, and community gatherings. The pandemic created great stress for much of the village center-based business community at a time when many residents have been staying closer to home looking for dining, walking and biking destinations, and easy shopping.

The City recently completed village center improvement projects in Newtonville and West Newton Square with street, sidewalk, biking, and lighting improvements and more trees, benches and art. Residents and businesses helped us design the improvements.

I have decided to commit \$250,000 of American Rescue Plan Act (or ARPA) funds to begin the engagement and design process for a streetscape improvement project that will update the heart of Newton Highlands. Upon completion, this exciting infrastructure project will support a multi-modal, business-friendly, resilient, inviting village center to accommodate all modes of transportation (pedestrian, bicycle, vehicular, and public transit users).

The project will proceed in phases. We'll begin by gathering ideas and information from residents, business owners, City officials, Area Council members and key constituent groups; by thoroughly analyzing and assessing existing conditions; and by identifying conceptual alternatives for improvements. The one selected as the preferred alternative at the conclusion of this Engagement and Conceptual Design phase will be advanced through the Preliminary and Final Design phases, and ultimately construction.

Our goal in our village center projects is to have "livable streets" with an enhanced resilient environment for our businesses and surrounding neighbors to thrive. We

look forward to lots of input in the coming months on the Newton Highlands Village Center.

NewGov: Online City Permitting/Licensing/Info System Going Live Nov. 1

Newton's new state-of-the-art online information system, NewGov, premieres on Monday, Nov. 1 to make finding and tracking information and applying for permits and licenses easier and more efficient.

Phase 1 on Nov. 1st includes (link [here](#) on Monday when it will become active):

- All mechanical permits and certificates of periodic inspection from Inspectional Services,
- All renewals of permits and licenses for food establishments from Health & Human Services, and
- All permits from Engineering

By the end of next year when all three phases are done, NewGov will simplify the permitting process by allowing residents, contractors and businesspeople to apply for building approvals, work permits and licenses online. Plus, it will allow the public to track the history and progress of work being done all across Newton.

That's not all. This major transformation of all city permitting and licensing operations and moving to an online system will greatly increase the efficiency of multi-departmental approvals, required in most building and renovation projects.

NewGov will transform how we conduct vital city business. City departmental operations and coordination, business and contractor interactions, and the ability for the public to research property information will improve dramatically.

(Photo: From left, Nick Cence, Engineering, Sherri Lougee, Health & Human Services, Deb Finamore, Inspectional Services and Commissioner John Lojek, Inspectional Services)



I knew the City systems were behind-the-times while I was a City Councilor so I determined very quickly as Mayor that we needed to make some really big improvements in how all city departments managed permits and licenses. I assembled a team in 2018 to begin the process of evaluating our needs and the software systems on the market, brought on a specialized consultant, and then, in late 2020, chose OpenGov as the City's new system. (OpenGov is used by over 80 communities in Massachusetts.)

The City Council approved \$1.1 million for the multi-year project implementation in early 2021 and then a combined City/OpenGov team began the process of “Newtonizing” the system to our exact needs.

Special thanks go to our project leader, Commissioner of Inspectional Services John Lojek, our core team leaders Deb Finamore from ISD and Sherri Lougee from Health & Human Services and for all the hard work by “superusers” Nick Cence of Engineering and John Miker, Jr. of IT. Chief Operating Officer Jonathan Yeo and Director of IT Joe Mulvey have also played key roles, along with City Councilor Chris Markiewicz and Neil Cronin of Planning.

NewGov will centralize all permits, licenses and information about a property into one comprehensive database. It will configure workflows to prompt departments on next steps on reviews and approvals. This will provide significant improvements for contractors and residents alike by allowing them to see more information online with greater “self service.” Contractors will be able to apply online for various requests for inspections and permits. NewGov also provides for online payment and allows City staff to create specialized reports regularly to analyze workflows and operations.

Phase 2 (expected in spring 2022) includes:

- All Inspectional Services permits including building permits
- All Planning special permits, comprehensive permits and permits requiring Conservation approval and/or Historic designations.

Phase 3 (expected in fall 2022) will add in other departments permits and licenses including City Clerk, Fire, DPW and others from Health and Human Services.

Newton is a Platinum BioReady Community

Good news: Newton is newly designated as a Platinum BioReady Community, the highest designation given by the Massachusetts Biotechnology Council (a.k.a., MassBio).

This platinum designation signifies that Newton has biotech and life sciences supportive zoning, a streamlined permitting process, a point of contact in City Hall ready to assist, and buildings ready for biotech uses. With a lot of work from our Economic Development Committee, City staff, and City Councilors, Newton is a great place to host life sciences research and manufacturing facilities.

Achieving the Platinum BioReady designation is both important and exciting for Newton. By welcoming more life sciences companies, we capitalize on Newton residents’ skills and experience, and help our biotech ecosystem flourish.

We’re seeing great life sciences and biotechnology activity in Newton. This includes the LabShares incubators, UMass’s Mount Ida Innovation and Collaboration Space, STC Biologics, Allena Pharmaceuticals, Acer Therapeutics, Karyopharm Therapeutics, and more. We are looking forward to welcoming more life science companies to Newton—at Riverside, in Nonantum, within the Wells Avenue Office Park, and beyond.

One of the keys for achieving the Bio Ready Platinum designation was the unanimous approval of the revised Riverside project which includes 370,000 square feet of laboratory and office space. As Rick Lipof, Vice President of the Newton City Council and Chair of the Council's Land Use Committee, recently noted, "The Newton City Council is fully supportive of Life Sciences and Biopharma."

Interested in knowing more? Please contact Devra Bailin, Newton Economic Development Director at dbailin@newtonma.gov or 617-796-1122 (office) and 617-831-0103 (cell).

*Wonder what happened to the painted pianos that decorated our City over the summer? Four of **Newton Community Pride's** artful pianos are now in Lawrence where the Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority hopes they will make time spent waiting for a bus or train more joyful, colorful and fun.*



Electing Mayor, City Council, School Committee and Area Councils

The City Clerk's election staff started mailing out vote-by-mail ballots this week for the Citywide Municipal Election on Tuesday, Nov. 2 to elect a Mayor and the entire City Council and School Committee.



This leaves a tight window for ballots to be mailed out and then mailed back to the City Clerk's Office to arrive by Nov. 2. Acting City Clerk Christopher Sullivan suggests dropping them off in one of the two secure ballot boxes in the front of City Hall (1000 Commonwealth Avenue) if possible or that voters mail back their completed ballots as soon as possible.

Ballots must be received by the City Clerk's Office by 8:00 p.m. on election day, Tuesday, Nov. 2 to be counted.

You can track your ballot at sec.state.ma.us/track.

Early, in-person voting for Mayor, School Committee, City Council and Newton Neighborhood Area Councils (in Newton Highlands, Newtonville, Newton Upper Falls and Waban) will begin at City Hall this Monday, Oct. 25 through Friday, Oct. 29 from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., and on Saturday, Oct. 30 from 8:30 a.m. to noon.

A Simple Act of Kindness

Here's a story of kindness and generosity from the Harvest Fair last Sunday. With the Mom's permission, I'm sharing the highlights of a simple, but meaningful, exchange first posted on social media:

My daughter and her friend wanted to play the game where you squirt the water gun and whoever is the most accurate gets to the top fastest and gets the prize. Well, round one, her friend won and she got a unicorn. So, of course, mine wants to try again. Alas, we did not win and my daughter was sad and disappointed. Next up, a young boy around 10 or 11 who easily won. The woman in the booth asked him what prize he'd like. Without skipping a beat, he chose the green unicorn. He turned to my daughter and said, "here, you have it" and walked away. Whoever raised this lovely child, thank you. My daughter was gifted a unicorn and she was beyond happy, but the real gift was the kindness of this young boy. It was a wonderful lesson. My daughter can't wait to do something "sooooo nice" for someone else. So, if that's your son, kudos. He ran off quickly so I could barely thank him or offer to buy him a candy apple.



I sign off this week happy to know that kindness thrives in Newton.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

P.S. Homer Street in front of the Newton Free Library will be **permanently back to two-way traffic** as early as Monday morning (weather permitting).

P.P.S. Over the past five months the Newton Planning Department staff heard from nearly 2,000 Newtonians – including renters and homeowners to business owners and employees – about **the future of our village centers**. Thanks for sharing your ideas. Now it's time to find out what the Planning team heard from all of you. Listen in at the City Council's Zoning and Planning Committee meeting on Monday, Oct. 25. Find the zoom meeting link [here](#). Staff will also host an additional info session about the results on Monday, Nov. 15 at 6:00 p.m. A presentation will be followed with Q+A until 7:30 p.m., so you can ask any questions you may have. [Register here](#). In the meantime, you can find *all* the input we received at the Zoning Redesign Village Center [website](#).

P.P.P.S. The **Newton Early Childhood Program (NECP)** is now accepting applications for students for the 2022-23 school year. The pre-school program is for 3 to 5-year-olds and integrates students with special needs into classrooms with peers, giving all children a chance to learn from each other. NECP also serves students on a part-time basis with services, including speech, occupational and physical therapy.



FYI: NECP will be moving from its current location at 150 Jackson Road to its new location at 687 Watertown Street during the next school year and we'll make sure the transition is easy and smooth. Interested? Learn more about the program and application process at the NECP website [here](#).

P.P.P.S. Feeling stressed or unusually depressed? Newton's Health & Human Services in partnership with Families for Depression Awareness is offering a virtual workshop on how to identify symptoms of stress in yourself and family members, manage stress as a family, respond when symptoms become "more than stress," and get help. **Addressing Family Stress** is on Tuesday, Oct. 26, from 6:30 – 8:00 p.m. Families for Depression Awareness will help facilitate and we'll hear from a licensed mental health professional. Register for the workshop [here](#).



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

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