

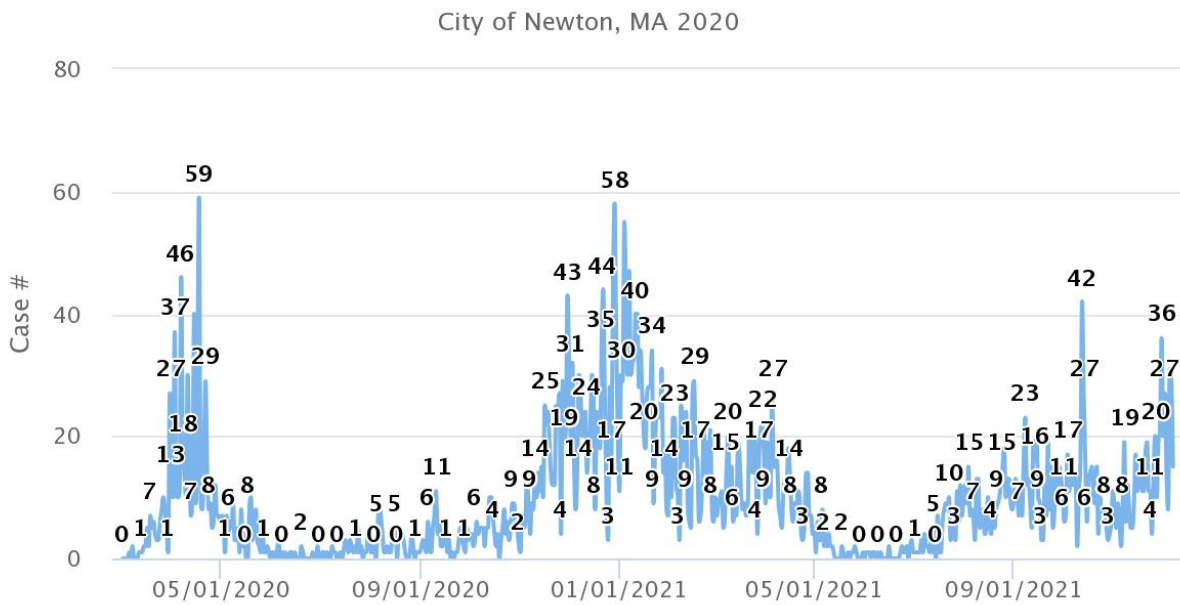
Mayor's Update



COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations are rising in Newton.

We had 168 new confirmed cases over the past seven days from Dec. 2 to 8, the highest number since early February. This is a jump from the approximately 105 cases per week we saw over the past 2 weeks, and from the 42 cases we saw in the first week of November.

Newton COVID-19 Cases



Confirmed Cases

Graph data through 12/8/2021

The positivity rate in Newton remains 1.1% of the 23,166 tests performed on Newton residents. Last week 1.1% of 18,315 tests came back positive. The statewide positivity rate is 4.5%.

The average daily incidence rate in Newton is now 18.9 cases per 100,000 population, up from 14.6 last week and 8.6 three weeks ago. The statewide average daily incidence rate has now climbed to 47.7.

Thirteen percent (13%) of the 243 people who tested positive during the State's two-week tracking period

COVID-19 in Newton

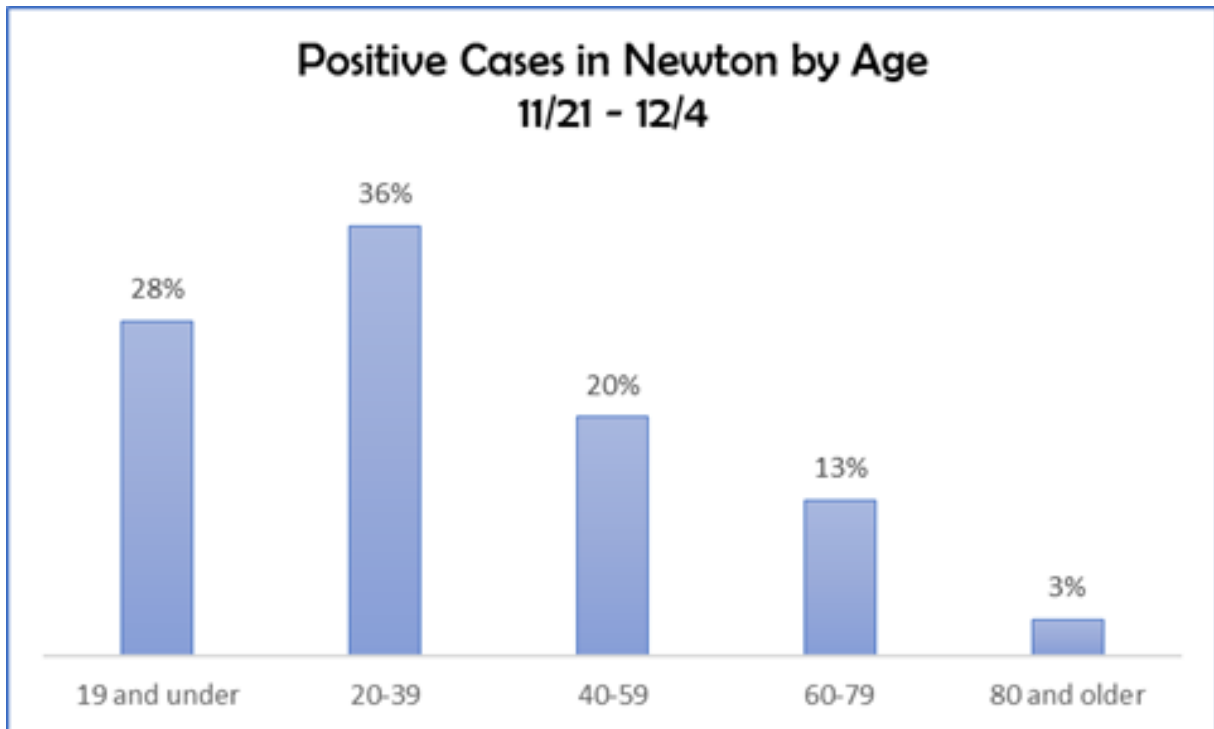
Total Cases
6,021

Total Deaths
220

*As of 12/8/21

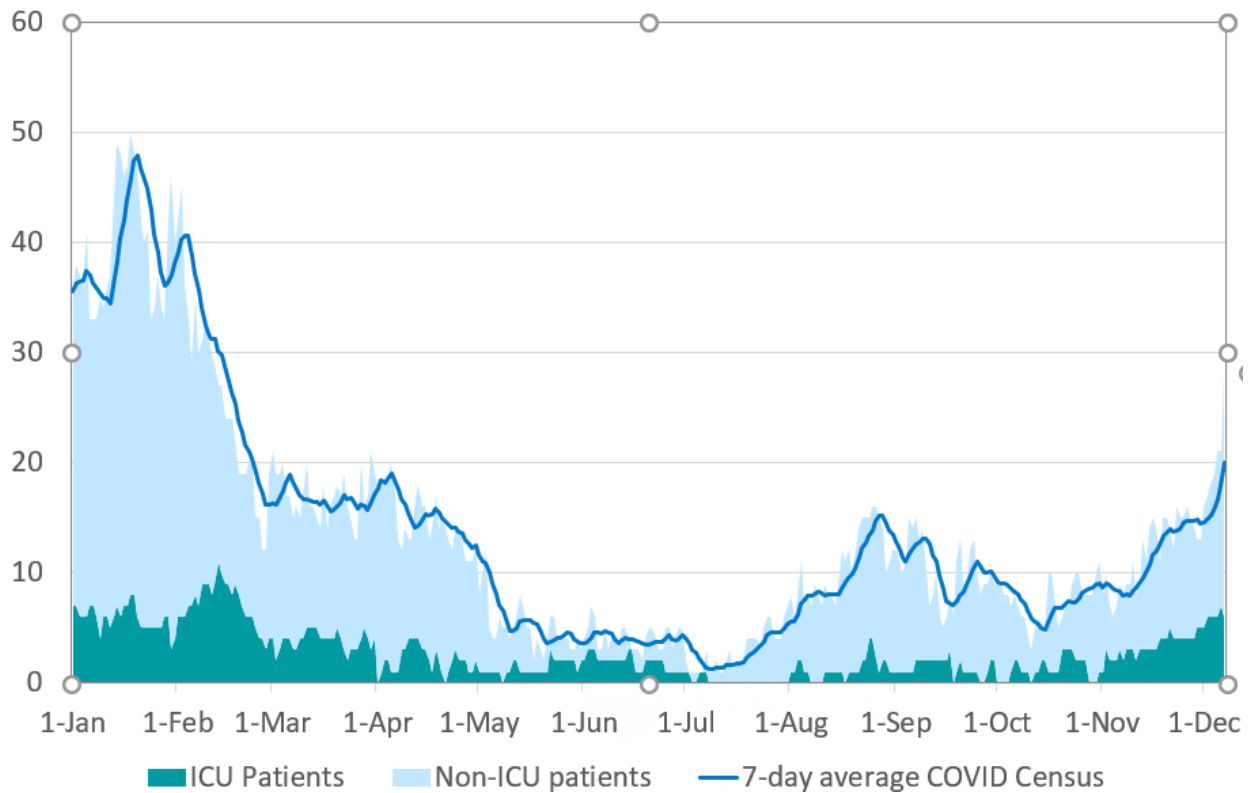
between Nov. 21 and Dec. 4 were students at one of Newton's institutions of higher education.

The ages of the people who tested positive in Newton during that time are lowest among people who are ages 60 and older:



Newton-Wellesley Hospital, as of Tuesday, Dec. 7, reports they are caring for a total of 28 patients hospitalized with COVID-19, a doubling of COVID-19 patients in one week. The hospital reports it has not had this high a number of patients hospitalized with COVID-19 in more than 10 months. Additionally, the number of critically ill patients with COVID-19 is rising with between five (5) and seven (7) patients per day over the past week.

NWH COVID-19 Census 2021



The good news, even among this worrisome data, is that no one in Newton died with COVID-19 this week.

Newton Public School COVID-19 Data

Sixteen (16) cases of COVID-19 among NPS students and nine (9) among staff members were reported to the Newton Health and Human Services Department between Dec. 2 and 8. This brings the cumulative total since school began on Sept. 2 to 225. (As a reminder, when looking at NPS data, sometimes cases are added to previous weeks based on tests as they are reported/confirmed.)

Find more information on the Health and Human Services webpage [here](#), and at the NPS Testing Data Dashboard [here](#).

Newton Director of School Health Services Ruth Hoshino gave a detailed presentation on the school testing program at the School Committee on Monday night.

Here are a few of her findings:

Symptomatic testing was done on 298 individuals who developed COVID like symptoms at school. Of the 298 people, six tested positive for COVID-19 with the rapid antigen test.

NPS has also been doing pooled testing for asymptomatic students in kindergarten through grade 6. In total, 5,007 pools have been tested comprising of 36,850 individual tests. Forty (40) pools came back positive. Of those 40 positive pools, it was found that:

- Three (3) were people infected with COVID within the last 90 days and may still test positive though no longer infectious.
- Fourteen (14) pools had an individual who had symptoms on the day of the specimen collection or by the next day.
- Fifteen (15) pools had an individual who was asymptomatic and positive.
- Eight (8) pools did not find a currently positive individual after a second round of testing.

As of Dec.1, there have been a total of 195 positive cases in the NPS community; of those 195, 77% were people who were unvaccinated.

You can watch the full presentation at the School Committee at [NewTV.org](https://www.newtv.org) (beginning at the 1:21:45 mark of the meeting).

Omicron Variant

The Omicron variant has been detected in at least 19 states, including Massachusetts in Middlesex County where Newton is located.

- The Omicron variant likely spreads more easily than the original SARS-CoV-2 virus.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) expects that anyone infected with Omicron can spread the virus to others, even if they are vaccinated or don't have symptoms.
- We are waiting for more data to know whether Omicron causes more death or illness that is more severe than other variants for the unvaccinated.
- While it is expected that people who are fully vaccinated can become infected with Omicron (i.e., a breakthrough infection), current vaccines (especially those people with a booster) are expected to protect against severe illness, hospitalizations, and deaths due to infection with Omicron.

We have the tools to fight Omicron

- Vaccines remain the best public health measure to protect people from all variants of COVID-19, to slow transmission, and to reduce the likelihood of new variants emerging.
- Masks offer protection against all variants of COVID-19.
- Tests can tell if you are currently infected with COVID-19, regardless of which variant you have.

Health experts recommend we use all of the tools available (vaccines and boosters, masks, testing, staying home when sick, and avoiding crowds) as part of a layered

risk reduction strategy to protect ourselves and others.

Learn more about Omicron from the [CDC](#).

Guide to Holiday Testing

Here are some answers to frequently asked questions about testing:

Should I get tested?

Anyone who is feeling *even mild symptoms* should stay home, talk with their healthcare provider, and get tested.

Based on guidance from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, testing is not required for people who are fully vaccinated close contacts who don't have symptoms. If you choose to get tested following an exposure (day 0), you should get tested no sooner than day 3 and ideally around day 5. People who are close contacts with symptoms should stay home and get tested, regardless of the number of days since exposure.

Which test should I get?

PCR tests are the gold standard for diagnosing a current COVID-19 infection, but home antigen tests can be useful in certain circumstances because they are generally less expensive, available in pharmacy/retail locations, and you can get the results quicker than laboratory-based PCR tests.

Wondering when to use a home test and how to interpret the results? Click [here](#) for a guide.

Where can I get tested?

A list of testing sites across the state, including Newton, can be found at mass.gov/gettested. Plug in a zip code and you can filter by distance, cost of the test, type of test, and more under *Advanced Filters*.

[CIC Health](#) continues to run a pcr testing site at Riverside in Newton.

Free home PCR testing is available to all eligible Massachusetts adults. Kits are reserved for adults (18+) who live or work in a congregate setting, are experiencing symptoms, have recently been exposed to someone with COVID-19, or who have otherwise been recommended for testing. Visit the [Pixel by LabCorp](#) for Massachusetts webpage for details, and to request a test kit.

Traveling internationally this holiday? Travel requirements have changed so be sure to check the [CDC's website](#) for requirements for testing.

Declining School Enrollment

What's happening to enrollment in the Newton Public Schools?

NPS Director of Data Analysis and Enrollment Planning Katy Hogue presented this year's Enrollment Analysis Report to the School Committee on Monday night. (Katy delivered a baby boy this morning!!) It's a lengthy report (186 pages) and full of details. You can read the full report [here](#).

Here are some highlights:

This school year's K-12 enrollment of 11,810 students (as of Oct. 1) is 100 fewer than last year, a continuation of a four-year trend in declining enrollment (with a particularly large decline of 775 last year during the pandemic.)

Declining birthrates resulting in fewer children entering kindergarten across the region show quite a few other "peer" communities experiencing similar enrollment decreases.

Note: The chart below includes pre-k through grade 12 enrollment.

Five Year PK-12 Enrollment Change in Surrounding Districts

School Year	Belmont	Brookline	Lexington	Natick	Newton	Needham	Wellesley	Westwood	Wayland	Weston
2021-22	4,356	6,928	6,790	5,308	11,974	5,515	4,290	2,894	2,711	1,948
2020-21	4,420	6,891	6,901	5,251	12,024	5,483	4,432	2,952	2,700	1,906
2019-20	4,700	7,777	7,190	5,529	12,779	5,706	4,862	3,000	2,707	2,039
2017-18	4,592	7,801	7,246	5,507	12,928	5,666	5,006	3,122	2,702	2,103
1 Year Change	-64	37	-111	57	-50	32	-142	-58	11	42
1 Year Percentage Change	-1%	1%	-2%	1%	0%	1%	-3%	-2%	0%	2%
5 Year Change	-236	-873	-456	-199	-954	-151	-716	-228	9	-155
5 Year Percentage Change	-5%	-11%	-6%	-4%	-7%	-3%	-14%	-7%	0%	-7%

Massachusetts DESE School Profile Enrollment as of October 1, 2021

Enrollment is projected to continue to decline over the next five years, even with an additional 325 students added into the projections from new developments across the City. Enrollment projections show a decline of 503 students systemwide over the next five years.

The projections show steady or declining enrollment at each of Newton's 15 elementary schools with two exceptions. Projections show Countryside growing from 371 students today to 394 in 2026, and Zervas increasing from the current 423 to 456 students. On the other end of the spectrum is Ward and Underwood Schools which are projected to dip from 211 and 221 respectively to under 200 students over the next five years.

The projections show enrollment declining at all four middle schools. Enrollment dips at Newton North while there is a projected increase at Newton South.

An increase in enrollment had been projected a year ago in Newton for this school year. The assumption was that many of the students who left for private school or to be homeschooled would return. Although some of those students have returned, NPS also saw fewer enrollments than usual this year from international students moving to Newton from outside the country.

During last year with the COVID-19 hybrid learning model, a total of 22.9% of Newton students opted for non-public school. This compares to five years ago, during the 2016-2017 school year, when 20.6% of Newton students went to non-public schools.

A New Affordable Housing Trust

Newton has a new, streamlined process to encourage and to fund affordable housing across the city.

This past Monday, following months of discussion involving the City Council's Zoning and Planning Committee, the Community Preservation Committee, the Newton Housing Partnership, and me, the City Council approved the creation of our first ever Municipal Affordable Housing Trust.

The state authorized the use of Municipal Affordable Housing Trusts (MAHT) in 2005 and more than 120 communities are using them.

Funding for the Trust is expected to come primarily from the City's Community Preservation Act. The Community Preservation Committee has targeted 35% of its annual funding for community affordable housing projects, and will transfer these funds annually into the Trust. This coming year this 35% translates into approximately \$1.6 million for the Trust.

Newton's Affordable Housing Trust will get going next year with the appointment of its new seven-member Board of Trustees. The Trustees will include the Mayor, a City Councilor, a Community Preservation Committee representative, and four residents with expertise in affordable housing development. A Planning Department staff person will assist the Trust in administering the fund.

Find more information and the language of the Trust itself [here](#).

Snow Shoveling Season

We got our first dusting of snow last night and, as New Englanders, we know more is coming.

As a reminder, we have snow shoveling requirements in Newton to help keep sidewalks safe and walkable.

When a storm hits, our snow shoveling ordinance requires all of us to clear the sidewalk in front of our property within a day or, more specifically, within 24 hours once the snow stops falling.

What happens if the sidewalk isn't cleared?

City employees will respond to complaints reported to our 311 system, take a photo of the violation, and issue warnings or fines. Property owners will first receive one warning if their sidewalk is left uncleared and is reported into the City's 311 system. The next complaint will result in a fine. Fines for residential properties are \$50 and will be repeated every 24 hours until the sidewalk is cleared.



Last winter 1,244 complaints were called in, 378 warnings were issued to property owners, and 224 fines were assessed. (Often when we check on a complaint, the sidewalk has been shoveled.)

Please know that sometimes we get a lot of snow and when our plows clear the streets, snow ends up on a sidewalk. Our DPW Commissioner has the ability to expand the timeline for when sidewalks need to be cleared if conditions warrant. That said, snow that we residents have cleared from the end of our driveway or from our sidewalk is sometimes pushed back onto them. It's frustrating. I understand and empathize. I also know that DPW has to clear the streets.

Parking Lots: Our ordinances make snowplow operators responsible for making sure the snow they clear from parking lots is *not* pushed onto a sidewalk. If you witness a private contractor pushing snow onto a sidewalk, please call the Newton Police Department at (617) 796-2100. The contractor can be fined.

The City of Newton snow shoveling ordinance applies *only* to sidewalks that are paved or cement. If the sidewalk in front of your property is grass or gravel, you don't need to shovel.

Waivers to our ordinance are available based on the combination of health and financial duress, or religious circumstances. Contact the Department of Senior Services at 617-796-1660 for more information.

Please, if you're able, lend a hand to a neighbor (which we've been doing a lot in the last two years) who might need help shoveling.

The Season to Give

I find it heartbreaking to imagine a child in Newton without a gift to open this holiday season.

If it works for you, consider buying a gift for a child aged newborn to 10 and dropping it off (unwrapped) at any Village Bank branch by the end of the day on Monday, Dec. 13.



(Also consider “shopping local” as we have toy stores here in Newton that can use our support.)

Warmly,

Ruthanne

(Photo credit: We had a joyous and generous Holiday Lights Spectacular at City Hall on Monday night with residents helping stuff a police cruiser with gifts and dropping off gift cards for our Food Pantries. (Even Leo seemed impressed!))

P.S. Join Newton’s **Code Red Emergency notification** service via text. Just text AlertNewton to 99411 and get emergency notifications such as information about missing persons, utility outages, weather emergencies, severe traffic tie-ups and more.



P.P.S. Still have **leaves and yard waste** that needs collection? We have extended the curbside collection deadline by an extra week until next Friday, Dec. 17. Bag your leaves and yard waste and put them curbside by 7:00 a.m. on your collection day.



P.P.P.S. Calling all puzzle fans! The Friends of the Newton Free Library is holding a **puzzle sale** this Saturday, Dec. 11, from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. in the Library gallery (on the left when entering from the Homer Street parking lot). All proceeds will benefit the Newton Free Library.



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

[Unsubscribe {recipient's email}](#)

[Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)

Sent by rfuller@newtonma.gov powered by



Try email marketing for free today!