

Thursday, Jan. 6, 2022

## Mayor's Update



### Deaths

Again this week, I report with a heavy heart that over the past seven days another two of our neighbors died with COVID-19, bringing our cumulative total to 225 residents we have lost.

### Newton-Wellesley Hospital

Newton-Wellesley Hospital, as of Tuesday, Jan. 4, reports they are caring for a total of 41 patients hospitalized with COVID-19, two of whom are in the ICU. Last week NWH had 25 patients in the hospital with COVID-19, two of whom were in the ICU.

Newton-Wellesley Hospital reports that the ages of the 41 patients hospitalized with COVID-19 range from 17 years to 96, with approximately two-thirds being older than 65 years of age. Additionally, approximately two-thirds of patients are hospitalized primarily for respiratory symptoms related to COVID-19. The other one-third are hospitalized with other illnesses and also have COVID-19.

Starting on Monday, all hospitals in Massachusetts will begin reporting the number of patients hospitalized primarily for COVID-19 and those who are hospitalized for something else and are positive while hospitalized.

### Positive Cases

Over the past 7 days from Dec. 30 to Jan. 5, the number of people in Newton who are positive and have their cases reported into the State continued to soar with 960 confirmed new cases. This is on top of the 1,124 we saw over the previous 15 days. This is by far the highest three-week case total we've seen since the pandemic began with the incredibly contagious Omicron variant now accounting for 95% of the cases in Massachusetts.

These cases likely do not reflect the true number of Newtonians with COVID since positive results found through "home tests" may not be reported to health officials.

### COVID-19 in Newton

**Total Cases**  
**8,300**

**Total Deaths**  
**225**

\*As of 1/5/22

Our positivity rate in Newton during the State's two-week tracking period from Dec. 19 to Jan. 1 is now 9.2% (i.e., the percentage of the 15,206 Newton residents' tests that came back positive), a significant increase from the 3.3% (23,798 tests) last week. The State's positivity rate now stands at 15.0%.

The daily average incident rate in Newton, which measures the number of cases per 100,000 population, is now 102.3, also a significant increase from last week's 57.3. The State's incident rate is now 151.7.

### Masks

We've learned through the course of this long pandemic that the virus is spread through respiratory droplets. Masks work especially when we choose the right kind and when they're comfortable and worn correctly. Click [here](#) for mask guidance from the CDC.

Newton has had a mask mandate for all indoor public places since Sept. 2, 2021. For example, masks are required in grocery stores and retailers, restaurants and bars, performance and event spaces, and salons as well as social clubs and places of worship.

### Boosters

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) this week updated their recommendation for when people who received the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine can receive a booster shot. The new recommendation is that individuals who received a Pfizer primary series (2 doses for most individuals and 3 doses for [some immunocompromised individuals](#)) can now receive an mRNA booster shot 5 months after completing their Pfizer primary series. The booster interval for people who received the J&J vaccine (2 months) or the Moderna vaccine (6 months) has not changed.

Additionally, the CDC is recommending that [some immunocompromised 5 to 11-year-olds](#) receive an additional primary dose of Pfizer vaccine 28 days after their second shot. The CDC also this week expanded booster eligibility to children 12 to 15 years old. The CDC now recommends that all adolescents between the ages of 12 to 17 years old should receive a booster shot 5 months after their Pfizer primary series. Data show that COVID-19 boosters help strengthen protection against COVID-19, including the Omicron variant.

The Newton Public School and Health and Human Services staff are working with the staff at the Holtzman Medical Group to plan another COVID-19 vaccine/booster clinic(s). Details to follow soon.

## Newton Public Schools COVID-19 Data

During the past seven days from Dec. 30 to Jan. 5, 194 positive cases among students were reported and 19 among staff. This brings the cumulative total since school began on Sept. 2 to 723 total cases. (Please know that the State Department of Education reported today some incorrect case numbers for Newton. We'll work with them on a correction.)

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

*(Photo: We handed out more than 1,000 home COVID-19 tests to NPS faculty and staff who came to City Hall on Sunday. Even with the surge, thankfully nearly 90% of NPS staff were in school this week.)*



## School Vaccine Data

As of Sunday, 73% of NPS elementary students, 85% of middle-schoolers and 92% of high schoolers have gotten at least one vaccine dose.

Vaccination Rates for Newton Public Schools Students by Grade	
Grade	Students with at least one dose as of 1/2/2022
K	73%
1	70%
2	72%
3	73%
4	75%
5	78%
<b>All Elementary (age 5-11)</b>	<b>73%</b>
6	78%
7	87%
8	88%
<b>All Middle School</b>	<b>85%</b>
9	90%
10	89%
11	91%
12	95%
<b>All High School</b>	<b>92%</b>

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### First Snow on the Way

Our current forecast shows the first real snow of the season will start slowly after 2:00 a.m. before accelerating into a quick-hitting punch of heavy snowfall during a two-to-three-hour window between 6:00 and 9:00 a.m. It then tapers off during the afternoon.

While accumulation is not expected to be more than 6 to 8 inches of light, fluffy snow, the timing of the heaviest snowfall during the morning commute is expected to create dangerous road conditions leading to the following trash/recycling collection delay and closings:

- Trash, Recycling and Christmas trees will be collected one day late – on Saturday, Jan. 8 for those residents whose usual trash day is Friday. Please have your trash and recycling out by 7 a.m. on Saturday for pick up. If you have a Christmas tree set out, please ensure it is set back from the street. We can't pick up trees buried in snowbanks.

- City Hall, the Senior Center, the Newton Free Library and the Resource Recovery Center on Rumford Avenue will be closed on Friday, Jan 7.
- Newton Public Schools will also be closed on Friday, Jan 7.
- NewMo will not operate on Friday, Jan 7.
- Snow-related issues may be reported to the City through the online 311 reporting system at [newtonma.gov](http://newtonma.gov) or by telephone at 617-796-1000. As always, call 911 in case of emergency.
- If you lose power, call EverSource at 1-800-592-2000.

As a reminder, we have snow shoveling requirements in Newton to help keep sidewalks safe and walkable. Our snow shoveling ordinance requires all of us to clear the sidewalk in front of our property within 24 hours once the snow stops falling. (Please help out a neighbor if you can.) Check [newtonma.gov](http://newtonma.gov) to find out when the snow officially stopped falling and the clock starts ticking. (It's also important to clear away the snow pushed onto the sidewalk after having your driveway plowed.)

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.

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## Arts Grants

The pandemic has made crystal clear how much we need arts and culture; yes, to enliven our village centers and bring customers to our small businesses, but more importantly to bring us together as a community and nourish our souls.

This morning I was so happy to join Parks, Recreation and Culture

Commissioner Nicole Banks, Director of Cultural Development Paula Gannon and awardees from so many of our wonderful Newton Arts and Culture organizations who received ARPA funding through the City's *Revitalize Creative Newton* grant program.

This investment will provide much needed support to organizations within our arts community as they work to recover, rebuild and re-energize our good city.

Congratulations (and thank you!) to the folks at:

- Cappella Clausura
- Jewish Arts Collaborative
- New Art Center
- New Philharmonia Orchestra
- Newton Community Pride
- Newton Cultural Alliance
- Newton Theater Company
- Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra
- Suzuki School of Newton
- Waban Improvement Society
- Zamir Chorale of Boston

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## Newton in Motion, a.k.a., NewMo, is Expanding

NewMo—Newton in Motion—our on-demand, shared-ride service that takes commuters, seniors, residents and employees anywhere they want to go in Newton

has had a wonderful surge in ridership in the last few months. (You call for a ride shortly before you want to travel and pay just \$2 a ride. Click here for more info.)

We expanded the service at the end of October so riders can go to and from anywhere in Newton. The expanded service has been very popular. NewMo is providing approximately 800 trips per week on average and 7,000+ rides since October.



Wait times and ride times are still low (with an average wait time of 16.2 minutes and an average ride duration of 12.5 minutes).

We want to make sure the service quality remains high, so this Monday, Jan. 10, we'll be adding a seventh vehicle to the fleet.

Also on Monday, in the face of the Omicron surge, we're limiting vehicles to just 2 passengers from the three now allowed. (We'll let you know when three passengers are again allowed.) Remember, masks are required. With the seventh vehicle added, we don't anticipate this to impact service. (Three passenger trips make up only approximately 5% of rides.)

Book \$2 rides on NewMo from your phone. It's simple – **download the App** (search NewMo Newton in your App Store) and book a ride. The App will tell you where to meet your driver, usually at a nearby corner to minimize detours. If you don't have a smartphone, sign-up and book rides by calling 617-655-8019.

NewMo is a great option for middle and high school students to get to and from school or to after school activities. Anyone 13 and older can ride anywhere in Newton with no service area restrictions. (Riders 13 to 17-years old can ride alone with adult consent; those under 13 need to be accompanied by an adult.) NewMo service runs Monday through Friday from 7:00 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.

For residents over 60, we typically recommend you sign up for the senior service to ensure door-to-door service and to get to medical appointments with pre-scheduling. To register for the senior service, start by contacting Newton's Senior Center at 617-796-1665 or Elizabeth Lund at [Elund@newtonma.gov](mailto:Elund@newtonma.gov).

For more information or to see if you qualify for discounted fare, contact Nicole Freedman, Director of Transportation Planning, [NFreedman@newtonma.gov](mailto:NFreedman@newtonma.gov), 617-879-8148.

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*Today we gathered on the Newton Centre green to dedicate benches and a plaque in honor of the life and legacy of the remarkable Linda Plaut. Linda's passion for the arts and for community, which she exhibited daily during her 45 years working for the City, left an indelible mark on Newton.*

*(Photo: Jonathan Plaut with me at today's dedication.)*



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## **Newton's Employee of the Year**

Officer Thomas Geagan grew up in Newton, attended the Newton Public Schools and took the oath of office as a Newton Police Officer thirty-eight years ago in 1985. That was a great day for the City of Newton.

Tom is the heart and soul of the Newton Police Headquarters. He is a kindhearted, caring, and compassionate, always watching out for everyone else.



*(Photo: Chief John Carmichael, Officer Thomas Geagan and Captain William Spaulding)*

In the words of Chief John Carmichael, "He is so committed to the City of Newton and the department. Tom is always trying to make things better, always wanting to help."

As an officer working in the Support Service Bureau which maintains police facilities and the fleet, Tom has distinguished himself as invaluable in the day-to-day operation of the Newton Police Department.

Always arriving early to the station and leaving late, he tackles a multitude of challenges. Members of NPD might find him on the roof of Police Headquarters cleaning drains, on a ladder poking through ceiling tiles, or addressing issues with



heating or air conditioning. When there is an emergency, he is right there. He is helping NPD and the Public Buildings Department design much needed upgrades. He also assists with technological equipment such as the live-scan fingerprinting systems and the simulation equipment at the firing range which officers use for training.

A problem with a cruiser? Tom is “under it,” diagnosing and fixing the problem. He understands the inner workings of the fleet and of the buildings. When he doesn’t, he knows who to call, collaborating with City engineers, facility vendors or whoever is needed to keep operations running smoothly.

If that weren’t enough, Tom is also the logistics planner for public events at headquarters, planning swearing-in ceremonies, promotions and community events. Tom is not only “the guy we call,” he is a gentleman and a backbone of our Newton Police Department.

With respect and appreciation, I today presented Officer Thomas Geagan with the City of Newton Employee of the Year Award 2021.

### **Newton's Innovator of the Year**

Kelly Brown is on the frontlines of adapting the way we work at City Hall to the new reality of masks, physical distancing, sick leave and vaccines.

This pandemic dramatically changed the role of our Human Resources staff and Kelly, who is the City of Newton’s Workers Compensation and Safety Manager. With her seven years of experience working for the City of Newton, Kelly’s innovative leadership has been invaluable helping employees work in their offices or at home safely while providing uninterrupted services to Newton residents (of which she is one).

Kelly is caring, responsive, incredibly intelligent and professional. She is endlessly patient. As the months of the pandemic wear on, she is extraordinarily giving of her time. In a sometimes shaky world, Kelly is a rock.

When face masks, physical distancing, hand sanitization and more became key tools in protecting us from infection, Kelly quickly researched and worked closely with the Newton Department of Health and Human Services team to develop workplace protocols. In the ever-changing world of COVID-19, Kelly worked with the HR team to revise these protocols seven times over the past 20 months.



Contact tracing is an essential tool in curbing the spread of COVID-19. Working on a nearly around the clock basis, she helped employees understand quarantine or isolation directives and notified close contacts to help slow the virus' spread.

With the virus causing some employees and their families to become ill, Kelly became the point person to handle questions, requests for paid leave and absences, and support to employees in need. Her scrupulous record keeping and coordination with employees has helping them and department managers while allowing the City to file for reimbursements from the state.

Kelly, with attention to detail and extensive knowledge of the applicable state and federal laws, is the lead HR staff member in implementing and managing Newton's COVID-19 Vaccination Policy.

Over the course of the past twenty months, Kelly has shown an unfailing willingness to step up when needed and help us adapt and act thoughtfully in the face of continually changing information to help lead us through uncharted waters.

With respect and appreciation, I today presented Kelly Brown with the City of Newton Innovator of the Year Award for 2021.

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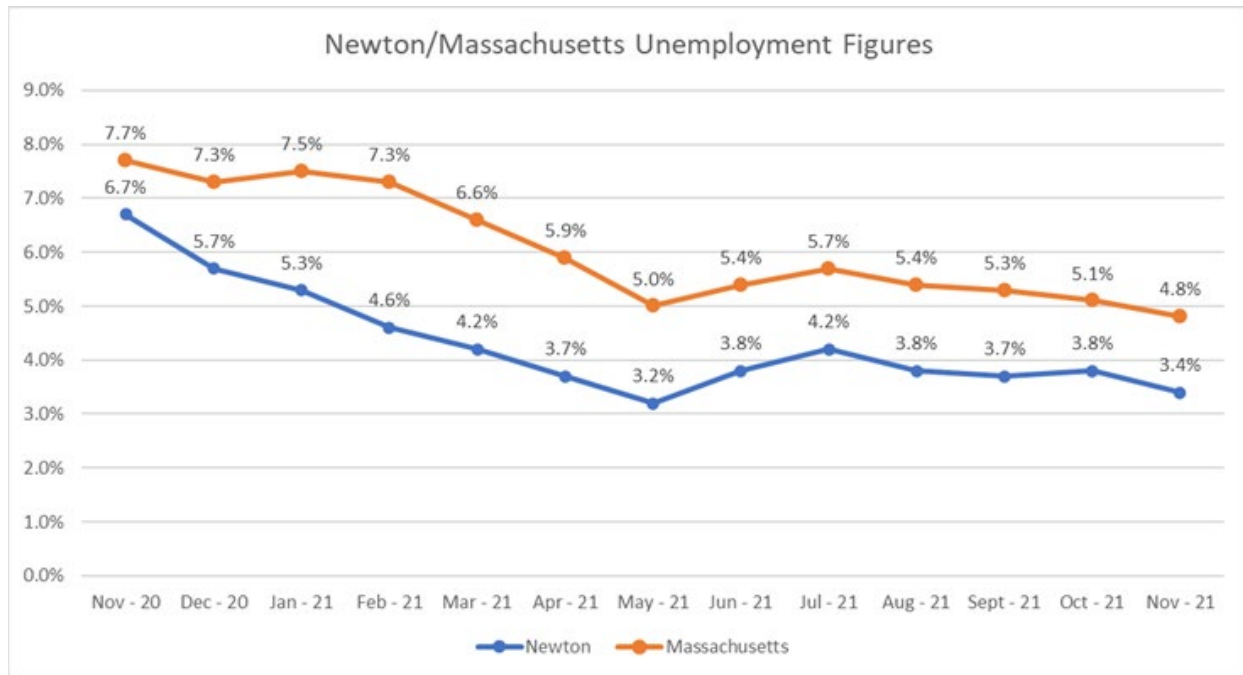


*After 30 years in public service, including working for the Newton Public Schools and as our City of Newton Comptroller for the past five, we say thank you and well done to Sue Dzikowski and congratulations to new City Comptroller Stephen Curley. Steve, a graduate of UMass-Amherst, started working for the City of Newton eleven years ago in the Treasury Office. He moved to the Comptroller's Office as an accountant eight years ago and spent the past four as Deputy Comptroller.*

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**Newton's Jobs Numbers Improving**

The latest numbers from the State show Newton’s unemployment rate in November 2021 fell to 3.4%, well below the 6.7% in November 2020 and our high of 9.3% in June 2020. (3.4% unemployment rate translates into 1,655 people out of our labor force of 48,000 being out of work.) Newton’s unemployment rate continues to be consistently lower than the statewide rate as well.



## Human Services Grant Opportunities

The City of Newton receives Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) funds each year from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. For the FY2023 program year (July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023), we anticipate receiving approximately \$1.9 million in CDBG funds and \$164,000 in ESG funds.

The City is soliciting applications for a portion of these grant funds.

**Human Services:** The City of Newton expects to allocate \$296,000 of its CDBG dollars to fund human service activities focused on supporting and enhancing the lives of vulnerable low- and moderate-income Newton residents across the lifespan. Applicants must be a certified 501(c)(3) organization or a municipal entity. Join us for a technical assistance session on Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 from 1-2 p.m. that is *mandatory for all applicants*. To RSVP and obtain the Zoom link, please contact Nika Sandal at [nsandal@newtonma.gov](mailto:nsandal@newtonma.gov).

Homelessness Services: The City of Newton expects to allocate \$151,700 of its ESG dollars to fund activities that prevent homelessness and enable homeless individuals and families to move toward permanent housing. Eligible activities include shelter operations, case management, rental assistance, and financial assistance. Applicants must be a certified 501(c)(3) organization. Technical assistance on the ESG program which is *mandatory for new applicants* is available by appointment. Please schedule your appointment by contacting Shaylyn Davis at [sdavis@newtonma.gov](mailto:sdavis@newtonma.gov). Appointments must be made by 12:00 p.m. on Jan. 17, 2022.

More information as well as applications are available online [here](#) and please know that applications are due by Feb. 2, 2022 at 5:00 p.m.

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### **A Tragic Anniversary**

On the one-year anniversary of the death of Michael Conlon, the memory of this tragedy in Newton is painful. Our hearts go out to Michael's family.

The Newton Police Department and the Newton Health and Human Services Department are committed to the safety of our community and our community members, including during crises which can be unpredictable and dangerous. We are committed to also continuously improving our community policing, crisis response and crisis prevention efforts. Training in crisis intervention and emergency health crises is intensive and ongoing for all officers of the Newton Police Department. We also continue our efforts with Human Services staff and with the Newton Police Department to bolster connections to support services to prevent crises for people struggling with substance use, addiction, mental health challenges and domestic violence.

I know this has been a difficult year as well for our officers in the Newton Police Department.

I also know people still have a lot of questions. At this time, all questions regarding the investigation and the inquest into the officer involved shooting should continue to be directed to the Office of Middlesex County District Attorney Marian Ryan.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

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P.S. **Curbside Christmas Tree collection** continues next week through Friday, Jan. 14. Place undecorated trees at the curb by 7:00 a.m. on your collection day (not in a plastic bag, please). Greens from wreaths can also be collected with the trees if the sprigs are pulled from the wire or plastic framing and placed in a neat pile or bundled with twine. (fyi: The trees and greens will be chipped into mulch.) Remember, if you're on tomorrow's Friday route, there is a one day delay because of the snow. Your tree will be picked up on Saturday.

P.P.S. Are you interested in **joining the Newton Police Department Dispatch team**? The City of Newton is now hiring. Dispatchers are our City's first, first responders, the voice you hear when you call for help. Dispatchers are an integral part of public safety, making sure police officers, firefighters and EMTs know where to go and how to help. Email [dispatch@NewtonMA.gov](mailto:dispatch@NewtonMA.gov).

P.P.P.S. Rotary Newton is running a **food pantry drive** from Monday, Jan. 19 through the following Monday, Jan. 17 in conjunction with the City's Annual Martin Luther King Day Celebration. Find collection boxes at all Village Bank locations, the Scandinavian Living Center (206 Waltham St.), Newton City Hall (1000 Commonwealth Ave.), and Newton Police Headquarters (1321 Washington St.). Requested items include canned white tuna in water, kid friendly breakfast cereal, jam or jelly, hearty soups, toothpaste and body lotion. In addition, register [here](#) to join us for this year's virtual MLK Day celebration starting at 9:30 on the 17<sup>th</sup>.

P.P.P.P.S. Twice a week a group of Newtonians meet at the Newton Senior Center for a ceramics class to create some amazing pieces of art. Check out their creations at **Ceramics: A Class Act VII** through the end of the month in the Main Hall of the Newton Free Library, 330 Homer Street. A new class with instructor Marc Mancuso is starting in February. Sign up for the Department of Senior Services/Senior Center newsletter [here](#) for info on registering for this and other programs and classes.



*(Photo: Artists Beth Brooks, Yael Melman, Donna Rae Hirt, Rita Foglia, Cathy Schlager, Homai Schmidt)*



P.P.P.P.S. **Friends of Newton Tennis (FoNT)** wants to hear from you about the future of tennis in our City. Which of Newton's 67 public tennis courts is your favorite? Do you play pickleball? Should FoNT coordinate tennis activities with other communities? With residents' input, FoNT will set its goals for the coming year and beyond. Take the short survey [here](#).

