

Thursday, March 3, 2022

## Mayor's Update

The COVID-19 data is all good. While it's too early to say definitively, it suggests the school vacation week when many Newtonians traveled did not cause a spike in COVID-19 cases in Newton.

Over the past seven days from Feb. 23 to March 2, we had 127 confirmed new cases of COVID-19 in Newton. This compares to 197 last week and 363 during the week before that.



Significantly, nearly three-quarters of the cases in Newton over the State's two-week tracking period from Feb. 13 to 26, (specifically 73%), are among students at one of the City's institutions of higher education that conduct COVID-19 testing. The percentage last week was almost exactly the same at 74%.

Newton-Wellesley Hospital reports as of Tuesday, March 1, only two patients with COVID-19 are hospitalized, neither of whom are in the ICU. This is the lowest number of patients hospitalized at NWH with COVID-19 since last summer.

The daily incidence rate in Newton (which measures the number of positive cases per 100,000 population) dropped to 34.9 from 47.5 last week. The positivity rate also remained relatively steady at 3.2% positive of the 15,533 tests performed on Newton residents, compared to 2.9% of 22,402 tests last week.

Continuing the good news, no one in Newton died with COVID-19 this week.

### Newton in "Low" Community Level

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention last week introduced their new [COVID-19 Community Levels](#) as a measure of the impact of COVID-19 illness on health and healthcare and as a tool for individuals and communities to make decisions about COVID-19 prevention strategies.

Under the new metrics, Middlesex County, where Newton is located, is in the Low category for COVID. The categories reflect new hospital admissions and inpatient hospital beds occupied by COVID patients. The primary CDC recommendations for those of us who live in Low category communities are to stay up to date on our COVID-19 vaccines and get tested if we have symptoms.

## COVID-19 Community Level

Low	Medium	High
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Stay <a href="#">up to date</a> with COVID-19 vaccines</li><li>• <a href="#">Get tested</a> if you have symptoms</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• If you are <a href="#">at high risk for severe illness</a>, talk to your healthcare provider about whether you need to wear a mask and take other precautions</li><li>• Stay <a href="#">up to date</a> with COVID-19 vaccines</li><li>• <a href="#">Get tested</a> if you have symptoms</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Wear a <a href="#">mask</a> indoors in public</li><li>• Stay <a href="#">up to date</a> with COVID-19 vaccines</li><li>• <a href="#">Get tested</a> if you have symptoms</li><li>• Additional precautions may be needed for people <a href="#">at high risk for severe illness</a></li></ul>
<p>People may choose to mask at any time. People with symptoms, a positive test, or exposure to someone with COVID-19 should wear a mask.</p>		

### Newton Public Schools COVID-19 Data and Mask Update

During the past two weeks from Feb. 17 to March 2, the Newton Public Schools had a total of 36 positive cases among students and eight (8) among staff. We are reporting two weeks today instead of the usual one week because of school vacation last week. These numbers compare to 21 student cases and 7 staff over the previous seven days from Feb. 10 to 16.

Having taken a straw vote on Tuesday night, the School Committee expects to vote on Monday to adopt Newton's Medical Advisory Group's recommendation to make masks optional in the Newton Public Schools starting on Tuesday, March 8. Masks, though, will continue to be required for people returning from COVID-19 infection on days 6 through 10, and in the nursing/health offices.

While the City mask mandate ended and the School mandate is ending, many of our residents, educators and students may choose to continue wearing a mask for a number of reasons. In Newton, we support that choice.

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### **Donating Blood**

Our country and the Greater Boston region are facing a national blood crisis. The Red Cross reports that we are experiencing the worst blood shortage in more than a decade.

Blood and platelet donations prevent delays in vital medical treatments. Donors who are Type O (+/-), considered universal donors, are especially needed.

Consider signing up for an appointment by using the [Red Cross Blood Donor App](#), visiting [redcrossblood.org](http://redcrossblood.org) or calling 1-800-RED-CROSS.

Here is a list of blood donation centers in Greater Boston:

- Red Cross – [Book an appointment](#) at Dedham Blood Donation Center - 180 Rustcraft Road, Dedham, or at Boston Blood Donation Center - 274 Tremont St., Boston.
- Mass General Blood Donor Center, 55 Fruit St., Boston – [Book an appointment](#)
- Kraft Family Blood Donation Center at Brigham & Women's Hospital and Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, 35 Binney St., Boston – [Book an appointment](#)
- Boston Children's Hospital, 333 Longwood Ave., Boston – [Book an appointment](#)

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## **City of Newton & Cyber Security**

In a world where bad actors can hack into computer networks to steal passcodes and confidential information, access bank accounts and financial documents, cripple systems, and hold entire networks hostage, keeping vigilant and up to date on the latest safeguards isn't an option – it's a necessity.

For obvious reasons, Newton's Chief Information Officer Joe Mulvey, who oversees the City's cyber security operation, doesn't want to divulge too many specifics about all the safeguards in place. Generally, the City employs three tiers of security which move from the outermost regions of our network down to our desktops and other physical devices.

### First Level: Firewalls and Routers

- Our firewalls and routers are the gateway for all internet access. They are updated daily using information from government agencies Department of Homeland Security and Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency.

- Our firewalls prevent unauthorized access from outside the City network.
- Geographic firewalls known as “geofencing” restricts remote network access to the continental United States and territories.

### Second Level: Servers and Apps

- Multifactor authentication (MFA) requires users to provide two or more identification verifications to access our system.
- Microsoft Advanced Threat Protection (ATP) filters email phishing, malicious email links, and attachments.
- All Newton servers are equipped with antivirus, are constantly patched and have up to date operating systems.

### Third Level: Users, Desktops & Data

- Endpoint antivirus and security software is installed on all workstations and one year of offline data backup is in storage.
- Use of dual storage area networks.
- End user training via Knowb4 phishing campaigns and with help from the Commonwealth.
- Active alerts for email access attempts outside of United States and territories
- Annual network penetration testing and risk assessments.

We also have protocols in place to address any breach of security that may occur.

There are critical steps we all should take to make our personal information more secure. We have come a long way from the original scams of a friend in need or a Prince who is trying to move money out of his country. Today, scammers do research, know their victims, patiently groom you into believing them through multiple conversations as they casually get you to lower your guard.

### Protecting Yourself

Our IT Department recommends the following security tips:

- Smart Cell Phone Use – Mobility gives our phones and tablets the convenience of access from anywhere. However, with smaller screens, it is easy to miss clues that would reveal themselves on larger monitors. Hover and inspect before clicking. Do not trust callers, emailers, web links or texting until you are convinced they are legitimate. If things look out of the ordinary, if something is too good to be true, or if somebody reaches to you out of thin air, be careful, even suspicious.
- Antivirus Subscription on All Devices – The IT staff strongly recommends against using free or trial versions of antivirus software. Your data and your financial information are too important to risk. Reputable antivirus software annual subscriptions are a critical investment.
- Awareness – Ever received a seemingly authentic email from a “friend” who is stuck in some kind of emergency overseas and needs you to wire money? Don’t! Whether people call, email or text, do not assume they are who they claim to be unless you are sure.
- Protect Smart Devices – Routers, smart devices such as intelligent electrical outlets and Ring door bells should all be protected with a sophisticated password of your creation. Disable any default passwords as they may be the same for an entire product line and easy pickings from outside your home.
- Phishing and Vishing – Whether it is an email telling you you’ve won the lottery (i.e., phishing) or the newer vishing, (i.e., voice phishing using telephones to launch cyber attacks), these are notorious and ubiquitous. Too often they target specifically older residents and people who are tech challenged. Be sure you know to whom you are speaking. Do not share personal information over email or over the phone. Ask for a number and tell them a family member will represent you and call them back. You can also consider subscribing to [nomorobo.com](https://nomorobo.com) to reduce robo calls.

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## **Black Student Voices**

I recently attended virtually a session of the Newton North High School Black Leadership Advisory Council (BLAC) Day program. These Black male students spoke courageously and their ideas are enlightening. Take the time to watch the video below. The panel gets going at minute 10:15:



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## Findings of the Newton Community Needs Assessment

A comprehensive assessment of the most pressing needs of Newton's economically vulnerable residents, especially given the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic was one of my first investments of the City's American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA) funds.

The City contracted with the Center for Governmental Research (CGR) consulting group to assist us in this Community Needs Assessment to hear directly from those most impacted by the pandemic. This past fall, our Health and Human Services team along with CGR sought input via a multilingual survey, targeted focus groups among community based organizations and among residents, and meetings directly with non-profit leaders, elected officials and direct service City staff.

We received the report in late February and the findings are clear. The pandemic had a disproportionate impact on people of color in Newton, led to substantial challenges with income and managing household expenses, and negatively affected people's mental health and well-being.

The report, available [here](#), includes findings broken out by participant income, principal language spoken, family status, age, and racial categories. The rank order of these needs varied slightly by demographic category but generally found the most pressing challenges faced by lower-resourced Newton households to be:

- Ability to pay bills was first, followed closely and likely exacerbated by loss of a job or a decrease in hours due to the pandemic (2<sup>nd</sup>)

- Meeting mental and physical health needs (3<sup>rd</sup>)
- Finding sustainable employment(4<sup>th</sup>) and finding/maintaining stable housing (5<sup>th</sup>)
- Securing affordable childcare (6<sup>th</sup>)
- Food insecurity (7<sup>th</sup>)

### Challenges Due to COVID Pandemic by Race/Ethnicity

CHALLENGES DUE TO COVID	Asian or Asian American	Black or African American	Hispanic or Latino	White or Caucasian
Meeting physical health needs	19%	36%	16%	24%
Meeting mental health needs	21%	45%	30%	30%
Paying bills	19%	60%	46%	22%
Balancing responsibilities	32%	36%	29%	24%
Lack of Internet access	1%	15%	6%	3%
Technology needs for an adult	3%	13%	10%	4%
Technology needs for child	9%	15%	6%	5%
Losing a job or decrease in hours that negatively impacted income	31%	38%	33%	24%
Finding work that makes up income losses	15%	26%	19%	13%
Feeding myself and my family	11%	15%	16%	8%
Finding or maintaining housing	17%	21%	14%	7%
Finding affordable childcare	11%	17%	8%	8%
Starting or increasing substance use	3%	4%	2%	3%
No new challenges due to COVID-19	13%	9%	10%	25%
Other	5%	6%	6%	8%
<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>344</b>

The chart is coded to show the percentage of respondents reporting each challenge (with the exception of *no new challenges*) by race/ethnicity. Red is the highest percentage, gold is the second highest percentage, light yellow the third highest percentage, and green is the lowest percentage.

CGR provided recommended approaches for the City to consider in responding to these findings:

- Providing direct immediate support to individuals (such as the City's \$4 million dollar investment in Emergency Housing and Utility Relief for Newton residents).
- Piloting a new program(s) aimed at holistic long-term stability for households.
- Adapting approaches to customize them to serve specific populations such as those who speak English as a second language.
- Supporting City efforts in continuing to engage with under-resourced Newton residents.

We are now reviewing the findings and carefully considering how best to utilize ARPA funding and our ongoing services to address the critical needs identified in the report. Do you have thoughts and ideas? Email us at [communityneeds@newtonma.gov](mailto:communityneeds@newtonma.gov).

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### **Lifeguards Needed**

Interested in becoming a lifeguard? The first step is completing lifeguard certification at any Red Cross approved program. Click on these links to find available classes at the [West Suburban YMCA](#), and through the [American Red Cross](#).

Once certified, consider applying to lifeguard this summer here in Newton at either the Gath Pool or Crystal Lake. It's a GREAT summer job. (We're also looking for swim instructors.)

Prerequisites:

- Be at least 15 years of age by the start of employment.
- Possess a valid American Red Cross Lifeguard certification.
- Be able to pass a 500-yard pool swim using crawl and/or breaststroke.
- Be able to work shifts during days, afternoons and weekends during the summer season (June, July, August).

Interested? Email the City of Newton Aquatics Director, Sean Nickerson at [snickerson@newtonma.gov](mailto:snickerson@newtonma.gov) to set up an interview (currently being conducted over



zoom). He'll explain the job duties and expectations and answer any questions you may have.

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## **Tragedy in Ukraine**

Tonight, the blue and yellow of the Ukrainian flag lights up the entrance of Newton City Hall. These lights shine as a symbol of our support for the people of Ukraine.

Ukrainians, soldiers along with civilians, are fighting courageously for their land, for their lives and for democracy.

We hear the air raid sirens and the sickening sounds of bombs falling on our televisions and social media feeds.

We see the photos of children driven from their homes to find shelter from the war in cold, underground subway stations, of families separated as trains pull out of stations heading across the border, and of bombed apartment buildings, schools and hospitals.

As we hear the sounds and see these photos, at first it seems as though these atrocities are happening to people far, far away.

Yet, we know the impacts are felt deeply here at home. For our Ukrainian neighbors, this war is putting their loved ones under fire.

Even as we stand with the people of Ukraine, we reach out our hand to our Russian neighbors; they too are worrying for their loved ones back home who are feeling the effects of a war they did not choose. Here in Newton, we hold firm to our shared humanity and there is no place for hate or intolerance of anyone.

Humanitarian organizations have mobilized to help the people affected by this war, including Boston-based [Sunflower of Peace](#), [UNICEF](#), [Doctors Without Borders](#) and the [International Committee of the Red Cross](#).

We pray for peace.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

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P.S. The City of Newton again this year received 40 invitational bibs from the Boston Athletic Association for the **126<sup>th</sup> Boston Marathon** on Monday, April 18. Bravo to the 40 athletes running for Team Newton who are all raising money for charity, and every runner or charity has a connection to our City. See the list of athletes and the organization they're raising money for at [newtonma.gov/TeamNewton](http://newtonma.gov/TeamNewton). Thanks to all the runners and those making donations. See you in April.

P.P.S. A busy day in Newton next Wednesday, March 9:

- From the music of women's suffrage and labor strikes to "flappers" and the blues singers of the Roaring Twenties, to Rosie the Riveter during World War II and the more recent feminist anthems by Peggy Lee and Helen Reddy, music tells a story. Learn more about women's history in song at **The History of Feminism in Music** with John Clark on Wednesday, March 9, from 2:00 to 3:00 p.m. Register for the virtual program [here](#).
- Are you thinking a lot about the next steps after high school? The City of Newton Youth Services, in partnership with the Newton-Wellesley Hospital Resilience Project and the Cole Resource Center, is offering a two-part virtual workshop series, "**Navigating the Post-High School Transition**," on Wednesdays, March 9 and 23 from 6:30 to 8:00 p.m. The two-part workshop focuses on general considerations for supporting adolescents with post-high school transition and supporting the post-high school transition for youth with mental health and unique learning needs. Parents/guardians and young people are invited. Register for the virtual program [here](#).
- Join bestselling author, Dr. Kate Clifford Larson, for a talk on Wednesday, March 9, at 7 p.m. about her book, ***Walk with Me: A Biography of Fannie Lou Hamer***. Born into the poverty and racism on the Mississippi Delta, Fannie Lou Hamer went on to become a civil rights leader, women's rights activist and the voice of the unheard. This program in honor of Women's History Month is part of the ongoing [Overdue: Confronting Race and Racism in Newton](#) series and is cosponsored by Historic Newton. Register for the virtual program [here](#).

P.P.P.S. It's time to start planning for **Newton Porchfest** 2022, the Saturday afternoon of free music performed outside people's homes. Interested in hosting a band in your yard on June 4? Porchfest is looking for hosts specifically in Auburndale and Lower Falls. All forms of musical talent are welcome – singer-songwriters, jazz quartets, rock bands, hip-hop groups, dancers and more. Learn more about Porchfest or sign up to participate [here](#).



P.P.P.P.S. Boston Magazine's annual **Top Places to Live** edition hit the stands. Calling Newton "the go-to for buyers hoping to trade in city life for a spot in the 'burbs," they say the city distinguishes itself with its homes "and even grander outdoor spaces."

